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NEWS

London, 16000

9. 1941

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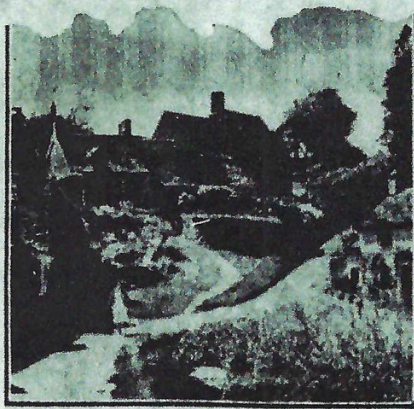
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Many city evacuees want to stay

"for ever" in the country—but

village life is not all milk-and-honey



# I Prefer Living In The Country

**I** REMEMBER on a hot Saturday afternoon in September, 1939, driving a large, clumsy car, lent by a neighbouring farmer, to the local railway station, and an hour later driving it back again, overcrowded with weary, confused, rather hysterical women and children—the first evacuees of the war from the East End. The countryside that day was extraordinarily tranquil and lovely: corn still in the fields, the sky hot and blue, the beechwoods still summer green on the parched hills of chalk, blackberry and bryony and scarlet viburnum berries on straw-tangled hedges in lanes where harvest wagons had brushed by from field to farm.

## Only One Shop!

IT was very hot, very lovely and very peaceful—and many, if not all, of those women were seeing it for the first time.

Yet they had only two questions. They put them to me almost before I had worked up through the clumsy car gears. "The village where we're going," they said, "any shops?" "One."

"Any pubs?" "One."

"Lumme," they said. The rest of the story is known in every village of England: how, after intervals of a week, a month, two months, these women preferred to go back and face the probable terrors of mass citizen warfare in some of the most despicable streets in the so-called civilised world rather than face a winter in the too-tranquil solitude of the country.

Since that date we have seen a great re-exodus to the countryside: not merely of the poor, but also of the rich. These two great movements of the population (and we shall probably see others), together with the evacuation of schoolchildren, constitute something like a social revolution.

As a result, two questions are being asked. Can the effects of such a revolution be in any way permanent—that is, will town-dwellers turn in disgust from town-life and live in the country? Or will peace bring a normal readjustment, with population centres much as before?

## So Disillusioned

ONE of the most persistent dreams of mankind, next to that involving sweepstake fortunes and ideal love, is the dream of retiring into the country. War has given thousands of people in

By **H. E. BATES**

England the opportunity of fulfilling that dream. Yet how many have been disappointed? How many have found country life empty, boring, colourless, unexciting? So very, very different from what they dreamed it would be.

There are thousands who cannot now answer that question. They have, unfortunately, answered it with their lives. But if they could answer I believe they would cry: "Lumme! One shop, one pub, no pictures, only half-a-dozen buses a day, miles from anywhere, no pavements—and, the people!"

All of which, of course, is true. "And another thing," they would say, "it's supposed to be cheaper to live. You're telling us! If anything, it's dearer. One shop—no competition. Charge the outside farthing, only one sort of this, only one sort of that."

"And where's the home-made butter we're always hearing about? Don't tell us! It's gone to London!"

All of which, of course, is true again.

What lies behind all this immense disillusionment? The answer, it seems to me, is very simple. These people, and thousands like them, have been kidded. They have been brought up on a land-of-milk-and-honey dream which bears no relation to reality. They have been brought up on the falsity that green fields and pleasant woods make an idyll, that fresh air is as good as food, that everybody in the country is kindly and honest and true.

## Will Not Go Back

SMALL wonder that reality to them was a bewildering disappointment. Their dream of Farmer Giles and roses-round-the-door, of honest ale and honest toil is a legend carefully preserved for generations of writers and playwrights and still preserved, to its discredit, by the B.B.C.

For there is no idyll of the country—except that which, as elsewhere, you make for yourself. There is no enchanted way of escape through woods and fields, from the common problems of existence. There is no ready-made cloud-cuckoo-land.

Yet many more people, having spent the greater part of their lives in towns, have found in the country their only chance of true

existence, and will not go back. And they, too, must have a reason.

They say: "The country is beautiful, it's never boring, it's exciting. You don't wait for spring: you watch it coming all winter. There are always flowers—primroses and violets even in January. The birds are wonderful—we've learnt to watch them and know them. And if the people are reluctant to make friends, there's a reason. They're suspicious of strangers—you're invading their territory. They'll accept you—in time."

And so on. All of which, of course, is true again.

But they, too, if they were honest, would tell you that they liked the best of two worlds. They would say, I think: "We do get tired of it sometimes, as you get tired of everything. But we can always hop on a bus and do a little town shopping and go to the cinema. And, anyway, there's always the comfort of home—we've got electric light and telephone and water, just like a town."

## In True Colours

THESE are the sensible—and the lucky—ones. To them the country isn't a one-shop, one-pub, one-eyed affair. It's a fine place. Birds are not just birds and trees are not just trees. Nor do they expect miracles. And why should there be miracles?

Because the air is fresh and the fields are green it does not mean that life is less difficult, less cynical, less problematic in the country than in the town. Yet generations of people have grown up to believe, in a vague sort of way, that it is so.

So if there is to be a revolution about living in the countryside we must, I think, prepare to make it ourselves. The sentimental land-of-milk-and-honey dream must be destroyed. The real character of the countryside, realistically drawn, must take its place.

People must be shown that country life, like town life, is dependent for its success on economic freedom, decent legislation, proper communal education and better working and living conditions. We must stop playing false about the countryside, and begin to paint it as it is.

## Best Way of Living

THEN we may get a generation who has not been hood-winked—who will go to the country and find it—as even with all its fault it is—the finest, healthiest, most satisfactory way of living in the modern world.

Until then, I see, in my mind's eye, an endless procession of town-dwellers going back to the town. To them country life will always be something of a swindle. They will never have known the difference between cowslip and primrose, between robin and nightingale, between oak and hazel, between hay-time and harvest. They will go back to a life as flimsy and temporary as a paper-boat—and never know that they were cheated out of a permanent one.

Thomas Burks, the author, will follow up this article with his reasons for preferring to live in the town.

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WE do not know about and its days, except he relaxed to allow Unoccupied France to dependa. That reaches me, beginning to feel in a way they do. When they im Countries and sm into France they confident and pl gutted every cou ran, systematically; they were so cool victory. What di conquered count derelict if their buted to a quick German victory?

## Anxious About

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## Goodwill of

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## Friendly Am

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Mrs. Biddle, w the photographer, greeting, "Very you. I like Engl you. While her hus



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with his duties i representative to in this country gum, the Poland. Mrs. Bid women's war of port on their to

## Pale Purgah

SIR RONALD worth heard in the Ministry commentary seri No man know of the East bett He was Kitchen tary in Cairo. liaison officer Saker's mission

## Naafi For Lipstick!

FOR the first time in NAAFI history, girls of the auxiliary services have been provided with one or two of these canteens all to themselves. They are in certain areas where the W.A.A.F.s, the W.R.N.S. and the A.T.S. girls are stationed.

Hitherto, men of the three fighting services have regarded any NAAFI canteen as their universal provider, not only for the staple commodities of life, from bacon to beer, but as the place where they can buy their "fags," chocolate or notepaper.

For more than 40 years this big organisation has looked after the needs of our fighting men. But now the stock of canteens catering for the women of the Services includes items which never before have been found in any NAAFI list.

Face powder, lipstick, vanishing cream, shampoo powder, cream and lotion for cleansing and softening the hands, manicure implements and mending materials are making new NAAFI history.

The girls in uniform make-up with good taste and restraint—and look all the smarter because their feminine vanity is satisfied. NAAFI retains its reputation, and "delivers the goods." E. M. V.

# HELP from a STRANGER