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DIG

FOR VICTORY

by H. E. BATES

I LEARNT much of the art of gardening at an extremely tender age by simply curling up in a great arm-chair in which my great-grandmother was alleged to have sewn a hundred sovereigns, but which I regret to say we never found, and there turning over the shining photogravure pages of Toogood's gardening catalogue. Pictures of foamy cauliflowers, onions as large as footballs, currants as fat and sleek as grapes, turnips like the cupolas of eastern temples—all were then imprinted on my mind as the high symbols of gardening success. Experience and some years of prodigal enthusiasm in the matter of gardening books has since taught me that no gardener need go farther for theoretical instruction than a good catalogue and a good arm-chair. Half a dozen catalogues from the foremost nurserymen in the country will contain some encyclopaedic stuff. They are the offerings, after all, of professional experts, most of whom after years of wrestling with the inexorable forces of growth and decay and a host of complaining ignorant customers, emerge as rather kindly, modest men. What they have to say, depend upon it, is not said lightly.

Catalogues are, however, things of impermanence. They fray, tear, grow out of date, vanish. Even the most modest gardener needs some-

thing a little more enduring. He needs a book. Having decided this, he then finds himself, in the act of choosing one, faced with a million at prices from sixpence to five hundred pounds, dates from 1587 to the present day. Here begin his difficulties.

If he confines himself exclusively to the culture of chrysanthemums, in which case he is no gardener, he has only one difficulty, of course, and can solve it for half a crown. But most gardeners have rather more catholic tastes, and a year of war puts on every gardener a new

REVIEWS OF

Grow it Yourself, *P. Izzard* (Daily Mail, 1s. net); Plain Vegetable Growing, *George E. Whitehead* (Black, 2s. 6d. net); Vegetable Crops Under Glass, *W. F. Bewley* (Country Life, 6d. net); Talks on Vegetables and Fruit, *C. H. Middleton* (Allen & Unwin, 2s. 6d. net); Fruit and Vegetable Preserving and War-time Gardening, *J. Stoney* (Murray, 1s. net); Pruning and Planting Fruit Trees, *J. Stoney* (Murray, 1s. net); Pictorial Practical Gardening, *H. H. Thomas*, Editor (Amalgamated Press, 3s. net); The Wright Encyclopedia of Gardening (Dent, 15s. net, and abridged Everyman edition, 2s. 6d. net); The Gardener's Companion (Dent, 7s. 6d. net).

obligation. This is intimately connected with his own survival, and simply means he must grow for himself a large part of the food he formerly bought.

Propaganda for this campaign comes from two schools: the patriotic and the common-sense. The patriotic digs up the lawn and the flower-bed, plants lettuces in the window-boxes and cabbages in the rose-bed, and ends up by feeding the fowls with the surplus. The common-sense is cautious, preserves lawn and flower-bed on the same

principle as prevents him breaking up his gramophone records, and practices intensive "cropping" and "inter-cropping" of vegetables in the proper place—i.e. in the vegetable garden.

It is all very simple—or would be if there were not half a million gardeners who find some difficulty in distinguishing a cauliflower from a brussel-sprout. To them, all talk of bastard-trenching, spits, pricking-out, spudding up, chitting, catch-cropping, bottom-heat, and so on might just as well be a new form of comic swearing. They do not know the difference between a pea-seed and a bean, or a carrot and a parsnip, much less the time for sowing these things. They are astonished to learn that brussel-sprouts grow on stalks, or even that potatoes do not grow, ready-made, in convenient boxes.

This section of the community needs guidance with care. To tell it to dig for victory is fatal. It must be told why to dig, how to dig, when to dig, and what to do with the ground when dug. A hope of something growing might then be reasonably established. To that section I should distribute, if by some unhappy chance I were Minister of Agriculture, wholesale copies of *Grow It Yourself*, by Percy Izzard (Daily Mail, 1s. net). Here is the most elementary stuff, sound, sensible, almost childishly practical, covering every side of gardening from the buying of the first fork to the picking of the first pod.

No beginner could go wrong in this book or its price; but inside a month he will need a supplement, and for that I should suggest *Plain Vegetable Growing*, by George E. Whitehead (Black, 2s. 6d. net), a new addition to the excellent Kitchen Front Library. Here he will find

more than thirty popular—and not all plain—vegetables sensibly discussed, together with a fine little calendar of gardening work, timing, and events. There is little danger of going wrong here either, and much less chance of any gardener, even a good one, growing out of the book before he has, so to speak, tried it on.

But soon, of course, a gardener gets ambitious. Not Latin names, perhaps, yet, but a bubbling desire to do as well, indeed much better, than the next man. Soon he develops competition rash—a symptom carefully commercialized by every newspaper every Saturday throughout the year, and by hundreds of gardening advertisements each week. Beat the bloke next door! This rash takes various forms—dahliaitis, carnationitis, rositis; it takes a dropsical form in the culture of marrows; it reaches its most virulent, incurable form in the hunger for greenhouses.

At this stage a gardener is just beginning. With glass he can beat the band. A line of cloches will give him winter salads; with a frame he can raise, from seed, anything from mustard-and-cress to a rare Himalayan alpine; with a greenhouse he can luxuriate among lilies, cucumbers, tomatoes, and even melons. For him, therefore, *Vegetable Crops Under Glass* (Country Life, 6d. net) is what some country folks call the "very identical." This excellent little book, which tackles the culture of glass crops (lettuces, carrots, tomatoes, radishes, cucumbers, beans, and others) from a sound commercial viewpoint, can be kept in the greenhouse itself—a stimulant on cool spring days.

Sooner or later there comes the question of the national institution—Mr. Middleton. His Sunday talks, compulsorily simple owing to the

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vastness of his audience, have no interest for me at all. He writes better: with knowledge, good sense, plenty of useful tips. For he is of course a first-rate gardener and had been well known as one for years before the B.B.C. persuaded him to adopt an attitude rather like that of a horticultural parson. His *Talks on Vegetables and Fruit* (Allen & Unwin, 2s. 6d net.) is good enough for anybody, therefore, and has some useful chapters on certain things, notably tomatoes, by companion experts. E. R. Jones's chapter on salads, for example, is excellent.

Finally, when you have grown the fruit, pumped up the marrows, and swanked about the largest pumpkin in the world, what to do about the surplus? Only two English fruits of any importance will keep through the winter; many of the most epicurean vegetables, green peas, young beans, asparagus, and so on, are summer vegetables, and are gone with the sun. Preserve them? *Fruit and Vegetable Preserving and War-time Gardening*, by John Stoney (Murray, 1s.) is the book—anything from bottling to soil analysis, seed-sowing to salad dressing. Sensible text, good illustrations. But first, of course, grow your fruit—and for guidance on that point get the same author's *Pruning and Planting Fruit Trees* (Murray, 1s. net). This, too, is good and is cheap enough in price to hold in one hand while the secateurs are held in the other.

All these books are good; none of them comprehensive. If you want the whole gardening set-up within two covers I would therefore recommend three books—*Pictorial Practical Gardening* (Amalgamated Press 3s. net), pretty, fairly encyclopaedic, packed with illustrations; *The Wright Encyclopaedia of Gardening* (Dent, 15s. net), with a shorter edition in *Every-*

man, which I have used with joy for some years; and lastly *The Gardener's Companion* (Dent, 7s. 6d. net) for the connoisseur, the epicure, and the lover of the form of things.

RAPID REVIEW

THE NINE DAYS' WONDER, by John Masefield (Heinemann, 3s. 6d. net).

THIS little book by the Poet Laureate is a straightforward collated account, from many sources, of the evacuation of the English and French troops from Dunquerque when France collapsed last June. It is well entitled *The Nine Days' Wonder*: and reading Mr. Masefield's unemotional, unvarnished, almost stark, day-by-day record of that achievement the reader's wonder grows, as does his admiration for the bravery and endurance of rescuers and rescued. How indispensable were both qualities we are reminded at an early stage in this account of what was called, in official parlance, the Dynamo Operation, when the narrator comments on the perfect target the Operation made for the enemy bombers—the German bombers who as usual showed their mettle by dropping their bombs on clearly marked hospital ships.

"Wherever his bombers flew they had a perfect target beneath them, columns crowded on roads, shipping crowded in a channel, masses of men upon a beach. During the week there were three hundred and fifty thousand men shut in within a narrow compass with all their possessions; any bomb dropping anywhere inside the perimeter was certain to be destructive. These bombers and their masters exulted at the sight."

That is one of the most memorable passages in a book which by Mr. Masefield's art is made a fitting memorial of one of the finest exploits in history.

In the same restrained fashion Mr. Masefield chronicles some of the individual examples of heroism among rescuers and those waiting to be rescued, who were seen by an observer in the dim light of dawn as curious patches of blackness on the sands.