

THE HORRORS OF THE COUNTRYSIDE

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CONTENTS

| | PAGE |
|---|------|
| THE ENGLAND MYTH | 7 |
| A JOURNEY TO THE COAST | |
| (1) THE SUBURBS | 8 |
| (2) THE COAST AND ITS TOWNS | 10 |
| (3) A SEASIDE RESORT | 11 |
| INCOMPREHENSIBLE HABITS OF THOSE VISITING RESORTS | 14 |
| THE MOTORING CLASSES SPEND A SUMMER EVENING IN THE COUNTRY | 17 |
| THE TWO COUNTRIES | 18 |
| RIBBON DEVELOPMENT | 21 |
| THE MOTORIST IN QUEST OF BEAUTY | 23 |
| THE BEAUTY SPOT | 24 |
| THE SOUNDS OF THE COUNTRY.. .. . | 25 |
| THE MISERS OF THE COUNTRY | 26 |
| WALKING ON THE ROAD | 27 |
| WALKING ACROSS COUNTRY | 29 |
| THE TIMIDITIES OF 'HIKERS' | 30 |
| AN 'OUTING' WITH THE WALKING FELLOWSHIP | 31 |
| COPING WITH KEEPERS | 34 |
| DISGUST FOR KEEPER-BAITING | 37 |
| LAMENT OVER A LOST PIECE OF COUNTRY | 38 |
| THE WILD PLACES | 41 |
| THE ARMY | 42 |
| THE FUTURE | 43 |

THE HORRORS OF THE COUNTRYSIDE

THE ENGLAND MYTH

It is generally believed that the English countryside is very beautiful. The home counties in particular are held to exhibit in a most marked degree those characteristics in which its attractiveness resides and which confer upon it its peculiar charm. These include farm houses, country lanes, village streets, thatched cottages, babbling brooks, water meadows, wayside flowers, coppices in spring, woods in autumn, and a general mildness of atmosphere, softness of outline and haziness of view attributable to the wetness of the weather and to the gentle contours of the land. These things combine to invest the south of England with a tranquil charm which is generally regarded as unique; those whose privilege it is to dwell among them are noted for a certain sweetness of character and serene dignity of living, while in the heart of the exile they live on as a memory of quiet loveliness, from which he should never have been parted and to which with wistful longing his thoughts inevitably return. Such briefly is the tradition of the English countryside, a tradition which is embellished by a long line of essayists and enshrined in some of the greatest poetry in any language. Not being a poet or a literary essayist I have refrained from embellishment, and set it forth as prosaically as possible.

A JOURNEY TO THE COAST

I. THE SUBURBS

FILLED with the emotions which a reading of this great literature engenders, you decide to make a journey through these same home counties ; we will suppose it a train journey through Surrey and Sussex from London to Worthing. The first twenty miles are continuous London. You pass through the southern suburbs, protracting themselves interminably like the lengths of a pulled out telescope. They are drab and squalid, meanly conceived and meanly executed, an abiding testimony to a passion for cheapness and an indifference to beauty. They culminate in a climax of ugliness at Croydon. Croydon, it is obvious, was built in the Victorian age. It is large and straggling, and falls into two parts : its centre is the same tangle of mean streets, undistinguished shops and radiating tram lines that you have already witnessed in Balham, Brixton, Tooting and Streatham. But, unlike the nearer suburbs, it is surrounded by a fringe of large detached residences, which bear witness to the premonitory stirrings in the Victorian soul of what was subsequently to become the twentieth century stampede to the country. Built solidly of yellow bricks they are imposing and very ugly. They are approached each by its own carriage drive wandering circuitously, in order to make it seem as long as possible, through a shrubbery of laurels, rhododendrons and other evergreens, behind which coyly lurks the house. Sheltered and screened, retired and reserved, discreet, pretentious and respectable, keeping themselves impeccably to themselves, as dull as they are ugly and as ugly as they are dull, these residences are an abiding expression of the civilization that produced them. They serve to carry us on from Croydon to Purley where the twentieth century begins.

The twentieth century joins hands with the nineteenth somewhere about Purley Oaks. Its predominant architectural colour is pink, and its predominant architectural note sprightliness. In rows of cheerful villas and bungalows the dormitories of contemporary stockbrokers sprawl over the Surrey hills ; the city man approaches, and the earth breaks out in an angry red rash, for all the world as if it had caught measles. Like their Victorian parents the stockbrokers are still imbued with the importance of keeping themselves to themselves, and, as a consequence, their houses are placed as far away from one another as their means allow. But not being so rich as the preceding generation of Croydonites, they cannot afford such large distances from their neighbours. Moreover, they do not find it necessary to hide their residences behind a merciful veil of evergreens. On the contrary they are blatantly exposed. Seen from the railway they greet you with a shout ; it is harsh and metallic, albeit cheerful, and it continues until you are well past Redhill.

Redhill itself, now continuous with Earlswood, stretches southward for half a dozen miles, Victorian at the core, red rash at the outskirts, but after Earlswood you run into something like country, which extends until you are well past Three Bridges. It is rolling country, well-wooded, fertile and intricate as is all the Weald, a fair sample, I suppose, of what all this South Surrey-North Sussex countryside must once have been. But it has been whittled away on both sides, until there is now no more than a thinnish belt, a bare score of miles across, to show what was the English countryside. And the belt grows narrower every year. Some twenty-five miles from London, London ends ; some forty odd miles from London, Brighton begins. Its influence first makes itself felt at Haywards Heath where the red rash breaks out again in a scurf of villas and bungalows, and from there to Brighton the bungalows are with us more or

less all the way, increasing in numbers and virulence as one approaches the coast. Before the coast is reached grass covered chalk ridges begin to appear. They run in long lines, and they are of all shapes and sizes ; but whatever the shape or size they are uniformly lovely, and make one of the most beautiful skylines in the world—or did, until the builder descended on them. For to-day the lines are broken and the clean, sharp edges serrated with teeth of angry red brick, the residences of city men. These staring great houses might seem to have been dropped there by chance, so devoid are they of any orderly or coherent arrangement, were it not for the fact that each one has been planned with a view to being seen over as large an area of the Downs as possible. You can see them, you cannot help seeing them, from any point within a radius of six miles, and seeing, you realize that the thin belt of country, such as it was, is definitely at an end. You are, it is clear, already within striking distance of the coast.

2.—THE COAST AND ITS TOWNS

The South Coast has now become one more or less continuous town. Brighton stretches out to meet Shoreham, Shoreham to Worthing, Worthing toward Littlehampton. Locked together in a continuing embrace these dreadful places spawn horribly over the countryside. Ugly in themselves, they have put forth growths which are even uglier. Big towns surround themselves with a ring of municipal dustbins, prisons and asylums, workhouses and cemeteries, where refuse souls and bodies are corrected, maintained and buried by the community. These in their turn are girt by rows upon rows of small houses, stretching out interminably into the countryside, fringed with allotments and threaded by motor roads. To the walker who does not choose to be chivvied along the

straight broad roads where the motors are, the business of getting out of one of these towns is fraught with immense difficulty. He will have to make his way along dingy side streets, through back gardens, over refuse heaps and across allotments. He will have to climb barbed wire fences, cross ditches, negotiate poultry runs, face the jeers of small boys and the curses of infuriated owners. Escaping he will find his way barred by a golf course. By the time he has negotiated all these obstacles and emerged at last on to the Downs, he will be in a state of nervous exhaustion, unfit for some hours to come to appreciate such beauty as remains to him.

Should he turn to the coast, he will fare no better. Along the whole length of seaboard from Brighton to Littlehampton the shore is polluted, and this pollution has infected practically the whole stretch of the coasts of Sussex and Kent. For example, take Camber Beach. Camber Beach near Rye in old days was a glorious stretch of sand flanked by low dunes with their coarse grass. To-day, before and behind the dunes, a bungaloid growth has sprung up of quite unspeakable ugliness and vulgarity. Shacks and old tramcars have appeared on the beach. A dozen shabby stalls, built apparently from sugar boxes or petrol tins, press tea, sweets and aerated waters on your unwilling attention. The dunes, where formerly you could picnic or bathe at will, are now for the most part shut off by barbed wire entanglements. On a summer's day gramophones and portable wireless sets compete against each other in a horrid cacophony. And all round the coast the same destruction of the elementary amenities of privacy and beauty is going on. Consider Shoreham, for instance, or Peacehaven!

3.—A SEASIDE RESORT

But to return to your journey. Having threaded its

way through some dozen miles of this sort of thing, your train brings you at last to Worthing. Worthing (and Worthing might stand for Eastbourne, Littlehampton, Margate, Bognor, Folkestone, Ramsgate, Ilfracombe, Blackpool, Yarmouth) is totally abominable. I have never been able to take our seaside resorts for granted ; like London, they have always seemed to me to stand in need of explanation, apology or excuse. Yet coming upon Worthing, as I did recently, in the middle of a hot day in July, I was struck anew by its purulent beastliness, its utter horror. The place was so much worse than I could have believed possible. Bad enough in itself compared with what it might have been, compared with what it was before it became a pleasure resort it was nothing short of a calamity. Along the length of its front there ran a hard, unyielding stone pavement, the promenade. On one side of it there was the glory of sea and sky ; gulls wheeled, sails glittered in the sun, and in the distance were shining cliffs and far to the left a line of downs on the horizon. On the other side, the side which has been laid out for 'pleasure', were eating houses and stalls and shop windows ; shops with buckets and spades, with ghastly imitation jewellery, with unusable pottery, dusty, archaic purses, pincushions made of shells, and ornamental pipes which no self-respecting smoker could ever have brought himself to put into his mouth : nothing real and everything pretending to be something else. Tawdry finery, sticky sweets, fly-blown cakes, and a general air of hot dustiness were the predominant features of the Worthing front. Over everything was the careless, squalid disorder of trivial profit-making. Even the beach had broken out into a rash of dirty side shows. Dirt, heat and discomfort were, indeed, the main features of the beach. The very pebbles were greasy, their surfaces covered with a film of dust.

Upon these pebbles people sat or reclined in attitudes

of varied discomfort. They were mainly family parties, the men bored, the women nagging and disagreeable, the children noisy and perpetually being forbidden to do things. Most of these families were eating something, and from time to time one was accosted by people soliciting one to buy more eatables, sweets or chocolates or ice cream, or shell fish in little saucers. Gramophones played, children cried and shouted, and the voices of boatmen inviting one to go for a row or a sail rose in rivalry. From a distance came the sounds of the jazz implements of a party of entertainers, mingling the hoots and wails of negroid music with the general clamour. Upon this scene the sun beat with great violence. Beaches are by their nature shadeless, and people wilted visibly in the heat. Seeking shelter under the unlovely pier which, supported on iron pillars, spanned the beach, I found the place unaccountably cold and draughty. It was too hot in the sun, too cold in the shade ; there was nothing left but to try the sea. The sea is, after all, what seaside places are for, and the ability to immerse oneself in it the one compensation for the horrors they engender.

Luckily I had a bathing-suit and towel in my rucksack, and finding a sheltered place behind one of the iron pillars, I began to undress. I had taken off a coat, a boot and a sock when an official descended upon me and told me that it was forbidden to undress upon the beach. I did not understand this, and asked him how one was to enter the sea without undressing. He replied that 'undressing' was permissible, but that it must not be done on the beach. The Corporation, he said, had provided huts and machines for bathers, and, if I liked to go and stand in the queue, I would doubtless, when my turn came, be allotted one. And taking me to the other side of the pier, he pointed out a long line of people extending from the promenade nearly to the edge of the

sea with towels over their arms. The head of the queue was at a small shed, a sort of office, from which a young woman dispensed tickets and costumes on payment of a sum of money. But the queue moved very slowly—owing to the heat, it seemed, the pressure on the accommodation was very great—and during the few minutes that I watched I only saw three persons pass the office. At that rate the people at the back of the queue would not enter the sea until nearly dinner time.

For the privilege of entering the sea at the seaside, it seems, you must wait and pay. And the south coast of England is increasingly becoming one continuous seaside.

INCOMPREHENSIBLE HABITS OF THOSE VISITING RESORTS

It is an astonishing thing, when one reflects upon it, that people should go to such places. Yet it is, I suppose, a fact that for the vast majority of civilized adults in this country a day at a seaside resort constitutes at once an ideal of happiness, a source of rest and refreshment and a vision of beauty. On such rare occasions as they are released for a few hours from the necessity of obtaining the means to make life possible, and have leisure to live, a visit to the seaside presents itself inevitably to their imaginations as the one way of living that really is living. A day on the beach at X—embodies and exhausts their conception of the good life. I once went to Southend to observe and participate in the enjoyments which the most advanced civilization that the world has seen offers to the bulk of its members. Getting out of the train I at once found myself a member of a great crowd which, streaming out of the station, moved slowly forward in a surging mass until we reached the sea-front. There with one accord we turned to the left and settled ourselves in the half mile

between a pier and some gasometers. This was one of the most unsavoury spots that could be well imagined, squalid and dingy, swarming with noisy beach photographers, winkle sellers, vendors of rock and post-cards. Why we stayed there none of us knew ; every other part of the beach, either in the direction of Thorpe Bay and Shoeburyness or Westcliff and Leigh, was quieter and pleasanter and prettier, but we settled ourselves down in a solid mass in this one half-mile, leaving it only to patronize one of the dreary 'amusement palaces' with which Southend is studded.

Why these places, which contain most of the duller features of a Bank Holiday Fair, attract people on their one and only holiday of the year I do not know ; at least, I think I do, but to pursue the question would take me far beyond the scope of this essay. Crowd psychology is, I daresay, involved in the answer. But crowd psychology is an ambiguous phrase. I take it to mean that, whereas, if you stand a sheep on its hind legs, you do not turn it into a human being, if you stand a flock of sheep on their hind legs, you do turn them into something passably like a political meeting, or a retreating army, or a crowd of holiday makers.

Machinery is, however, the real villain of the piece. If you pass your days in tending machines, feeding them and cleaning them and warming them and giving them the wherewithal to eat and drink, they will come, as masters always do, to impose something of their own nature upon the servants who tend them.

Thus men become uniform even as machines are uniform, and soulless even as machines are soulless: In America where the application of machinery to life has proceeded furthest, the lack of individuality is most marked. Americans dress alike, look alike, talk alike and think alike. It is appropriate that Behaviourism should be the special philosophy of Americans, for it is to peculiar

Americans that it is peculiarly appropriate. So dependent are they upon the machines in whose likeness they grow, that they cannot conceive of the good life except in terms of them. Working with them day in and day out they cannot even play without them. To step on foot throttles, insert coins in metal slots, scan headlines, pass through clicking turnstiles, hurtle rapidly through the air in aeroplanes or down the inclined planes of water chutes, these are the pleasures of mechanical men. And they must be done in concert ; they must be enjoyed in crowds. Hence, when we come to the amusements of British robots, we find that they are modelled on the same pattern. They are partaken of in crowds with the aid of machinery.

But I seem to be allowing myself to be drawn insensibly into the digression I feared. My excuse must be that the phenomenon of the British population enjoying itself is so remarkable, that it is not humanly possible just to mention its pursuits and leave it at that. It clamours for comment, and a word of explanation must be attempted in passing, even if it is both digressive and inadequate. Moreover, it is not to be expected that a population so trained and so employed can do other than spoil the country, when it descends upon it—you cannot expect people whose sense of fitness has been dulled by inhabiting Leyton or Rawtenstall to come to terms easily with beauty, even if they could recognize it—and the horrors of the countryside are my theme.

But so far I have concerned myself only with the comparatively poor. In company with them we have travelled down from London by train, and looked at Worthing and Southend. What of the middle classes? The middle classes are busy enjoying the country ; they are on the roads. What does 'on the roads' mean?

THE MOTORING CLASSES SPEND A SUMMER EVENING IN THE COUNTRY

It is a summer evening and all day I have been walking. I have had cold beef and pickled onions, bread and beer for lunch, and at six o'clock I am making for the nearest station to catch a train back to town. I have been walking across country, part of the time on the Downs, and since three o'clock in the afternoon have seen only one shepherd and a country woman sunning herself at the door of a gamekeeper's cottage. It is a perfect evening, still and mild; the air is a benediction, the slight breeze a caress. The sunlight lies level in lances of gold across the fields; faintly from the distance comes the sound of church bells.

Suddenly I become aware of a noise; it is an irritable noise like the buzzing of a swarm of angry bees, but more explosive and less regular; it is more as though a regiment of soldiers had begun to suffer simultaneously from flatulence or a herd of swine to belch in ragged unison. The noise is accompanied by a smell, a smell of oil and petrol. . . . Presently I top a rise and come into full view of a main road. The road is covered with cars. Bonnet to tail they stretch continuously in an unending procession. From time to time the cars break wind irritably in one another's faces. The procession moves, now faster now slower, and every now and then two cars in it change places; but always it goes on. Above it there hangs a murky, blue haze. The faces of the motorists are strained and angry; upon them there is an air of tense expectancy, and in the intervals between their spasmodic bursts of activity they glower at one another. From the country they are completely cut off; they cannot see its sights, hear its sounds, smell its smells, or enjoy its silence. They are hemmed in by other motorists and, even if they were alone, they are in no frame of mind for æsthetic enjoyment. The pool cannot reflect the sky when it is

troubled, and these motorists are very troubled, for they are trying to pass each other. Growing interested in the sight, I sat down on a fallen tree on the top of a rise overlooking the road, and began to count. From this eminence the main road presented exactly the appearance of an ant run, and, as it was now towards evening, nearly all the ants were facing the same way. The motors, I found, were passing at the rate of 600 an hour, in an almost continuous line. Above the tremendous din of their passage could be distinguished a screeching of electrical horns, mixed with the high-pitched hooters of motor cycles. Just ahead there was a crossing where the main road was cut diagonally by a smaller one, and every now and then the motors would be held up to let the cross traffic pass. When this happened, there was a great honking and hooting on the part of cars trying to get the advantage of each other, and directly they were released they all began with one accord to bellow and shriek and scream at one another, like a pack of fiends released from the nethermost pit. The noise of all this was appalling ; it spread for nearly a mile on each side of the road. And, wherever there is a main road in England to-day, there over an area two miles wide along the whole length of the road the peace of the countryside is shattered.

That is how the motoring classes enjoy a summer's evening in the country. And the habits of the motoring classes constitute an ideal of ' enjoyment ' for nine Englishmen out of ten.

THE TWO COUNTRIES

THERE are in England to-day two countries existing side by side. There is the country as it was, the country through which I had been walking that summer's day ; and there is the country as it is becoming and as it will

increasingly become. The first is quiet and peaceful, and the people who live in it are dull and a little stupid. Their status is prescribed by a well defined hierarchy. There are the squire and the parson, the farmer, the publican, and the agricultural labourers. These last form the bulk of the country population ; they go to church on Sunday and forgather of an evening in the pub. They know their place and their betters; but, although they are respectful, they are rarely servile, and about them there is a quiet dignity. It is still possible to find, even in the counties bordering on London, villagers who know no more of the metropolis than did their ancestors in the days when packhorses performed the office of railways and motor lorries. When it is invaded, this country does not change ; it disappears, often with startling rapidity, and is replaced by country number two.

Country number two is the country which surrounds the towns and adjoins the main roads. Its characteristic features are petrol pumps and garages, tea places, usually 'Old English', shanties, bungalows and innumerable notice boards. It has few native inhabitants, but it is a dormitory for town workers and a corridor for motorists. Maiden ladies retire into it and keep poultry farms. Those of the original working folk who remain in it abandon their traditional occupations and become parasites on the motorists and suburbanites ; they keep wireless sets, buy gramophones and tea cakes in frilled papers, batten on the Sunday press and grow basely rich. Their country pubs are replaced by motoring hotels in the hinder parts of which they drink in dingy obscurity. Country number one had a life of its own ; country number two derives its life from the towns. To pass from country number one into country number two is to pass from one age into another and from one civilization into another ; it is to exchange silence, dignity and beauty for noise, vulgarity and ugliness. And country number two

encroaches continually on country number one. A few years ago it comprised only the main roads, the suburbs, the coastal towns and a few 'picturesque' villages and beauty spots; but it spreads like a blight and every year the diseased area extends further. London in particular is a centre of infection. According to the Report of the Greater London Regional Town Planning Committee published in 1930, the population of Greater London is expanding at the rate of over 1,000 a week, and building is going on at the rate of four solid square miles of houses a year. That is the explanation of the red rash of Purley, which we saw on the way to Worthing, and of the ribbon development that now extends practically from London to the coast.

We are, in fact, witnessing a new phase of the industrial revolution. The nineteenth century saw the influx from the country to the towns; the twentieth witnesses an efflux from the towns to the country. Not that the original influx has ceased; on the contrary, the countryside, countryside number one that is to say, is being drained faster than ever, and the old life of the country is rapidly disappearing, to be replaced by a new. And the new is the life of the towns artificially introduced into the country.

At the approach of the newcomers the old country disappears. It is, indeed, a most pathetic thing to see how the exodus of those who find life in the modern town no longer tolerable destroys the very rural amenities which they go forth to seek. Pathetic but inevitable, for you cannot take the kingdom of beauty by storm, nor acquire the life of the country by simply dumping yourself on the countryside.

We must, I think, concede that it is some obscure desire for the country that accounts for the Purley rash. Young people, in particular, returning from a life of open-air hardship endured during the War, resolved not to go

back to the cramping rows of suburban houses from which they had emerged. At the same time the suburban lines were electrified and access to the towns was cheap and quick. One went, then, and lived in the country. What could be more obvious? Thus the return to the country was in many cases the outcome of a definite need, the expression of the desire for a new way of life. Yet how inadequately is the need fulfilled!

RIBBON DEVELOPMENT

TAKE, for example, the phenomenon of ribbon development. I had occasion recently to motor along one of the new arterial roads, the one running from London to Southend. For the greater part of the way it was flanked by houses, so that one had the sensation of motoring through a continuous loosely strung out town. A few of the houses were semi-detached, but the great majority were separated by nicely calculated intervals of half a dozen or a dozen yards. At the back of each house was a narrow strip of garden, at the far end of which there were cabbages; a barbed wire fence separated the cabbages from the flat Essex country, which, inflamed by occasional blobs of angry pink, stretched mournfully away into the distance.

Here were no satisfying lines or harmonious colours, upon which the eye could rest and be at peace, no suggestion of country quiet. On the contrary there was continuous noise caused by the motors which passed at the rate of a dozen or so a minute, hooting violently at each other. For to every house there was attached a garage, advisedly, since the neighbourhood, threaded by its main arterial road, provided admirable facilities for escape in the car. Apart from this it was difficult to see what could be said for it. There were no signs of civic life,

no churches, chapels or meeting houses, but equally there were no signs of rustic pursuits, no farms, no ricks, no animals. Except for their cultivation of cabbages, which could have been undertaken equally well at Ilford or Barking, there was no positive characteristic to distinguish the lives of these dwellers in the 'country' from those of their brethren in the towns. They did not till the soil, pasture animals, shoot, fish or ride; they did not even go for walks. Nobody could walk along the arterial road, and for miles on end no roads led away from it. Possessing none of the advantages which town dwellers lacked, they nevertheless lacked most of those which town dwellers possessed. They could not go to theatres or cinemas; they could not call upon their friends, for all kept themselves rigidly to themselves, and no man knew his neighbours; they enjoyed neither private peace nor public excitements, and they could not lose themselves in a crowd. Only on Saturday afternoons and Sundays they took advantage of their admirable opportunities for escape, and went for a drive along their arterial road to Southend, I suppose, or to London. Cut off from the life of the spirit, outcasts from the great herds of their kind, without part in a community or roots in the soil, they continue to keep themselves to themselves and to go out in the car on Saturdays.

Why are they there? Again I can only answer because of some obscure impulse which causes them to feel a dissatisfaction with life in the towns without fitting them for life in the country. They have no knowledge of country things, neither skill in country pursuits nor love for country sights and sounds, and no capacity for solitude. Yet something impels them to dump themselves upon the countryside, and they spread like locusts over the land.

THE MOTORIST IN QUEST OF BEAUTY

It is the same impulse to leave the beaten track that is taking motorists in increasing numbers off the main roads. There was a time when no motorist left a main road of his own accord ; he had two aims, to travel as fast and as smoothly as possible, and the unparagoned brutality of an environment composed as it was of wooden fencing, hoardings, advertisements, garages, petrol pumps, villas and other cars, gave him no temptation to linger. To-day people are at last discovering that motoring for pleasure is no pleasure at all, and are beginning to ask more of their cars than that they should merely convey them rapidly through space. They have been led to understand that somewhere behind the noise and the hurry there is a place of peace and refreshment known as the country ; and they are beginning dimly to recognize that they know no more of this than before they owned their cars. And so motorists are met with in increasing numbers in bye-roads, trying, as far as the virus that is in their veins will permit, to drive slowly, pretending to enjoy the scenery, stopping to look at views, discovering country villages, picnicking cheerlessly by the roadside. They even drive their accursed mechanisms on to the Downs. Have I not with my own hand pulled a man off a motor bicycle on the top of Blackdown ?

But no more than the dwellers in the villas and bungalows do they find what they seek. The motorist straying off the main roads is driven by the need to escape from modern civilization. He is a man seeking to withdraw himself ; he is in quest, though he may not know it, of a retreat, a retreat bathed in an atmosphere, the fragrance that is distilled by old and traditional things. He finds it, but only for a moment, for, in the act of finding, he transforms it into something other than what he sought. It is a lane, say, leading to a village ; yet scarcely has he

passed that way, when others follow in his wake. Gradually the lane is widened to accommodate him. Each year the banks are cut back, the hedges trimmed, the edges tidied. Presently the native surface which reproduced the colour and characteristics of the soil, disappears beneath a coat of tar, and the transformation from a lane into a road is complete. Another weal left by the whip-lash of civilization seams the face of the land.

There is a country lane that runs past my old cottage ; or, rather, it was a country lane. To-day it is thick with motorists trying anxiously to escape from other motorists.

THE BEAUTY SPOT

AND what of the village at the end of it ? As the motorists reach it, it is miraculously and pitifully transformed. The country pub becomes a second-rate motoring hotel, the village street a roaring thoroughfare, the village shop an emporium for picture post-cards. Garages and tea-shops spring up like mushrooms, and on every side the country breaks out into the familiar red rash. The village has changed its character. It *was* beautiful ; it has become a 'beauty spot'. It will be said of this generation that it found England a land of beauty and left it a land of 'beauty spots'. The motorist, in fact is the modern 'Midas' ; whatever he touches turns to tin and brass.

In this and a hundred ways the country recedes at the motorist's approach, and in this and a hundred ways country number two encroaches and grows at the expense of country number one. Already it is a rare experience to come upon a landscape in southern England that is not flawed by at least one modern bungalow, planted, as bungalows almost invariably are, so as to command, and in commanding to ruin the maximum possible area. You

may have been walking for an hour in a secluded valley, and quietly happy or exuberantly exhilarated you feel at peace with a world which is becoming innocuous because remote. You top a rise and immediately there breaks upon the view some shouting pink horror to remind you that the remoteness was an illusion. Civilization, it seems, in the south of England, is always just round the corner.

THE SOUNDS OF THE COUNTRY

AND what is true of the sights of southern England, is still truer of its sounds. Silence, the peace of the country, is becoming yearly a rarer thing, and as it grows rarer it grows more precious.

Our civilization, which boasts of hygiene and despises the men of the Middle Ages because they had no drains, has made a more serious assault upon the senses than the bad smells for which it reprobates its ancestors. The world may not smell to-day except of petrol, but never assuredly was it so noisy. Modern civilization, in fact, has saved its nose at the expense of its ears. I sat one evening last summer in a garden in Hampshire of such peace and beauty as only English gardens know. It was in the heart of the country, an undulating country of fields and woods and streams, far from any main road, farther still from a town. Half a mile away was the nearest village, a hamlet of a few thatched cottages in the shadows of the Downs. As I watched the sun setting slowly into a haze of ruddy gold, my ears were suddenly assailed by the noise of a loud speaker, more powerful than a company of many men, bawling through its brazen snout the incomprehensible words and disjointed rhythms of some American negro song. The sound smote the horrified air but only for a space ; for presently along

the little lane outside the garden came the noise of a motor-cycle. With a succession of shattering explosions like a machine gun or an electric drill, it approached, passed and hurled itself away into the distance. For five minutes the sound of it was audible, and then came another. For in the little hamlet half a mile away there were half a dozen of these machines. This murder of solitude is now universal in the south of England. Noise is taken so for granted that nobody complains ; but we pay in ill temper, shattered nerves and loss of the ability either to concentrate or to meditate, for this invasion of our peace, this thwarting of our need for solitude and silence. And yet, I repeat the point, it is largely to the growing dissatisfaction with modern civilization, to a distaste for its sights and its sounds, a dislike of its hustle and turbulence that this continual encroachment upon the country is primarily due. Paradoxically it is those who are most dissatisfied with country number two who are chiefly responsible for the disappearance of country number one. It is the newly-discovered sense of beauty in the motorist, which is responsible for the destruction of beauty. We are entangled, whether we like it or no, with the apparatus of our civilization, and eventually we destroy what we invade.

THE MISERS OF THE COUNTRY

AND knowing this we grow miserly and secretive about the country. We make discoveries of inns and villages, of hills and lakes and coves and valleys, and we are jealous to keep them to ourselves.

I have been engaged for some years past in collaborating with three other men in the compilation of a list of places, inns, farms, cottages and so forth at which one may stay in the country. To be included a place must possess the

following qualifications : it must be in unspoiled country ; it must be comfortable ; the food may be simple but must be good ; it must be cheap and motorists must not know of it. These last two qualifications are, in fact, the same qualification. Provided that the conditions are satisfied, it is immaterial whether the place is an inn, a hotel, a boarding house, a farm house, or just ' digs '. The list, of course, is for private circulation and is jealously guarded. A considerable number of the entries are addresses in the north of England ; there are a few from the Midlands, a very few from Devon and Cornwall. Dorset, Wiltshire and the Cotswolds are well represented, and East Anglia has several mentions. Hampshire too appears, though there have been many deletions from this county in recent years, as it has been increasingly overrun. But the Home Counties are practically unrepresented ; whatever entries there were, have, with one or two exceptions, been removed. In Surrey and Sussex, Kent and Bucks there are practically no places left that possess the required qualifications (I repeat ' practically ' because, as I say, there are still one or two exceptions, which wild horses would not drag from me).

WALKING ON THE ROAD

AND now that by a devious route I have returned to the Home Counties, I want to put the question which has prompted the writing of this paper. What, under modern conditions, is the country walker to do ? He cannot, it is clear, walk on the roads. Apart from the perpetual noise and stench and harrying of the cars and the unyielding tarred surface, there is the unvarying brutality of their scenery. The new arterial roads to-day are practically hedgeless and treeless. They are lined not by living things but by iron or wooden fences interspersed at

intervals with villas planted singly or clustering in pink blocks. There are also pumps and garages and boards covered with paper. These last are to be found in amazing numbers. They are mainly advertisement hoardings; but there are also sign posts, A A notices, builders' boards and estate agents' announcements that such and such tracts of country are to be developed and offer eligible building sites. When the surrounding country can be seen, it is raw and mutilated. Nobody, it is obvious, can walk here.

There are, of course, the side roads and the traditional country lanes. But even these, as I have already pointed out, are invaded and invaded increasingly by cars escaping from other cars. To walk on them is to invite constant harrying from the drivers of these cars. The motorist assumes automatically that it is the business of everybody and everything to give way to him. Bearing down on you suddenly from round the corner of some winding lane, he demands insistently that you should stand aside and let him pass. And, if you do not get out of his way soon enough to please him, he will play a perfect devil's tattoo on his horn and make a pretence of driving over you. Certainly, if you refuse to budge, he will consent to slow down. I have even, when in a desperate mood, made him stop altogether; but the flurry of nerves engendered by this defiance destroys all the benefits which are supposed to attend country walking, and leaves one as exasperated and ill-tempered as the motorist himself. No, assuredly, the walker cannot walk on the roads.

Hence, all that literature of walking and walking tours in which the English language is so rich, of which the essays of Hazlitt and Stevenson and Richard Jefferies are luminous examples, is hopelessly out of date. For it is mainly a literature of road walking; it presupposes a different England, a country in which motors were unknown and the roads were walkable. But

that country is no more. Even that fine essay entitled '*Walking*' written in the early years of this century by Sir G. M. Trevelyan, is hopelessly inapplicable to modern conditions.

WALKING ACROSS COUNTRY

BUT, if you cannot walk on the roads, where can you walk? Across country? But nearly all the south of England is enclosed. Apart from the farmers, traditionally hostile to those who 'trespass' on their land and particularly fierce in the Home Counties, it is owned by stockbrokers who breed pheasants, and maiden ladies who breed poultry. Both are given to fencing, and the country is accordingly criss-crossed with barbed wire as if it were a disputed sector on the Western Front. Where the roads are teeming with cars and the country is barred and fenced, where all the woods are private and all the fields farmed and trespassers will everywhere be prosecuted, what is the walker to do? There are footpaths, of course; but a footpath, pleasant as it is, is limited, and every year sees more of them closed to the public, while many of those that remain are fenced or walled in on either side to prevent the feet of walkers straying on to the sacred properties through which they run. What, then, I repeat, is the walker to do? What, indeed, but to go across country, climb the fences, break through the hedges, cross the ploughed fields, brave the notice boards and trespass?

Personally, I have always preferred cross country walking to any other kind, and should still to a large extent go across country, even if the roads were tolerable and it were not forbidden. You get more varied walking that way than any other; to go across a field and over a hedge, through a copse, and then over another hedge into an orchard, and so through a gate into a farmyard with

barking dogs, to be followed by a quarter of a mile down a lane and then up a bank and over another hedge and so into the fields again is for me the ideal type of normal walking ; it is what a walk should be. In a mile of it you see more country sights and hear more country sounds, you come across more flowers, you get more glimpses of bird and beast, and you have more peace to your soul than in a week of road walking or a month of motor tours. You know nature, and the knowledge brings peace to your soul. And if you have no desire to witness the small incidents of natural life and your soul is already at peace or troubled past appeasing, there is always the exhilaration produced by manifold physical exercise and the excitement of coping with farmers and keepers. For, the country being private and not free, these latter are a constant menace.

THE TIMIDITIES OF 'HIKERS'

Now I find people's attitude to these pests of the countryside rather puzzling. There has been—it is notorious—a great revival in country walking these last few years. Fired by the example of the *Wandervogel* and eager to escape from the civilization which their parents have made, young men and women scour the country at week-ends in increasing numbers. They go in twos and threes, in groups of ten or a dozen, and in organized parties of twenty or more with a guide or leader. There are walking clubs, rambling clubs, and 'hiking' clubs. For it is not customary to call these activities walking, but tramping, rambling and (especially in the north) 'hiking'. 'Hiking' is more energetic than rambling, and ardent hikers will do their twenty-four or even thirty miles a day—along roads, of course. Now these young people subscribe in theory to the views expressed in this

pamphlet. They profess a love for the countryside, lament its ruin and regard motorists as their natural enemies. Most of them, moreover, belong to the Labour Party and have Socialist opinions, including an objection to the private ownership of land and a contempt for keepers as a parasitic class, base minions of the rich. As for farmers, they consider them to be gross reactionaries who embrace diehard politics as an excuse for underpaying their labourers, and automatically oppose all movements for social betterment. Holding these views, it is not to be expected that the young people of to-day who walk through the countryside on Saturdays and Sundays should entertain an exaggerated respect for the rights of landowners. Nor, indeed, in theory, do they; they affect to ignore the injunctions of notice boards, despise the menaces of keepers, and cheerfully profess their willingness, nay, their eagerness to trespass. In practice, however, I find them as law-abiding as the most jealous farmer could wish. They keep to the paths, observe the boundaries of hedge and fence, dutifully obey the injunctions of notice boards, and, on the rare occasions on which they can be tempted to defy them, go in terror of keepers and apologize abjectly whenever they are caught.

AN 'OUTING' WITH THE WALKING FELLOWSHIP

I WAS recently asked to lead an all day 'ramble' for a body, which I will call 'The Walking Fellowship', one of those numerous organizations for inducing people to enjoy out of door activities in company. I arranged to meet the party at Newlands Corner at eleven o'clock one Sunday morning, the time being fixed to allow them 35 minutes to walk the two miles from Clandon station. At about a quarter past eleven the advance guard of the party

appeared. They were aggressively dressed for walking, with woollen stockings, bare knees and hob-nailed boots or shoes ; some of the women wore breeches ; every back had its rucksack, and many carried iron shod sticks or staves. In spite of this tramping apparatus the party did not impress me very favourably. They contrived, I thought, to look less like walkers than like mannequins displaying costumes for walkers. Accordingly by way of experiment I made a few remarks on country walking. Did they, I asked, mind climbing fences, breaking through hedges, crossing streams, getting their feet wet and their boots muddy ? They answered that they did not ; they were, they said, used to these things, so much so that a walk which omitted them would be no walk at all. Did they, I concluded, mind trespassing ? Of course they didn't, there was nothing they liked better. They were quite unanimous about this, and seemed surprised that the question should have been asked.

I took them along the ridge of the North Downs to a point opposite St. Martha's, and then ran down the slope to the valley. At the bottom there was a ploughed field ; it had recently been sown, but nothing as yet showed above ground. I went across it at a fair pace ; at the far side I found that I was alone. I turned round and saw to my surprise the 'ramblers' straggling slowly and hesitatingly across the fields, the hindmost a good quarter of a mile behind. When they came up, they began to remonstrate with me. Was it not wrong to cross ploughed fields ? Did I not know that it was one of their rules to do no damage to property ? I pointed out that it was impossible to walk without walking over private property—the farmers and stockbrokers were everywhere—and impossible to walk over private property without doing a certain amount of theoretical damage. If they were to leave the roads, then it was necessary, I said, that they should in theory do damage. Or, I asked, did they think one ought

never to cross fields? Apparently, when it came to the point, they did; they always kept to the footpath. And then why did I go so fast? They were not accustomed to running. 'Not even down hill?' 'Not even down hill.'

St. Martha's is covered on the north side with woods which are strictly private. As I went through them, I heard sounds of altercation. The hinder members of the party had, it seemed, become embroiled with a keeper. How they dealt with him I do not know, but when some twenty minutes later they reached the top, they reported that they had been trespassing on private property, and that they had been caught. I shall never forget the look of shocked horror with which they told me this; they looked as if they had been guilty of some unforgivable offence, of the nature of sacrilege or blasphemy, for which they deserved and expected instant and condign punishment. And so it was all through the day. On the south-east side of St. Martha's there is a steep drop of a couple of hundred feet or more through a wood to a lake. I ran down this as fast as I could, revelling in the steep descent. There were only two with me at the bottom, two who had begun to enjoy this novel method of 'rambling' and ran as I did. The rest climbed painfully down with torn legs and stockings, muddy shoes, wet feet and woebegone appearance, and they were still straggling in twenty minutes later. Two never turned up at all.

On the far side of Blackheath there was another encounter with a keeper. I was ahead and had passed by before he was fully arrived on the scene, and a few were with me. But the bulk of the party was deeply embroiled. For ten minutes or more they stood arguing, provoking the keeper by alternate displays of truculence and humility, and in the end solemnly giving their names and addresses, in order that they might the better be summoned. By the time lunch was reached, a lunch eaten miserably in

the open air and an east wind with a great display of wholemeal bread and health-giving cheese and green stuffs, the party had diminished by a further five ; at tea only half the original number were present, and only nine of the original thirty caught the eight o'clock train with me at Clandon. And yet you would have thought that these people were walkers ; they dressed like walkers, talked like walkers—at least they talked interminably about walking—and belonged to an association formed for the express purpose of getting young people into the open air. Also they were acutely conscious of what they considered to be their right of access as citizens to the countryside, and vocally defiant of those who sought to deny them the free exercise of their rights.

COPING WITH KEEPERS

THIS talk of rights reminds me to say a word about keepers. There is a definite technique for dealing with keepers, a technique which includes several different methods adapted to variations of need and mood and the exigencies of time and place. At the best method I have already hinted ; it is always be in the front of and, if possible, leading a party. Persons so placed who meet a keeper can afford to ignore him and to proceed as if he were not there. For the keeper confronted with this situation will be torn different ways ; on the one hand he will wish to pursue you and curse you for your impertinence ; on the other, he will see a considerable posse of people bearing down upon him from behind and will be moved to stay where he is and remonstrate with them. In my experience, nine times out of ten, he will do the latter. Thus the rearguard of the party draws the keeper's fire, while you in front pass serenely out of the infected area. But the rearguard cannot stay long, since they dare not run

the risk of losing you, and with you their way. Consequently, however great their fear of the keeper, they are obliged to defy him and to continue on their way, being impelled by a greater fear. They find you waiting for them some three fields ahead. You greet them with a look of amused surprise that they should have thought it worth while to bandy words with a keeper.

But this method, admirable so far as it goes, can only be followed when you have a large party behind you. For walkers caught alone a number of different methods of keeper discomfiting are available, all of which I have on occasion employed with success. There is, for example, the polite method. On sighting the keeper you approach him, making, if possible, signs of surprise and pleasure, explain to him that you have unfortunately missed your way and ask to be directed to the nearest road. To pursue this method successfully it is necessary to speak in a governing class voice and with a cultivated accent. In the course of your remarks you may mention that from the appearance of the woods and the length of time you have wandered without coming upon a road, you have begun to suspect that you must be on private property ; if this is, in fact, the case, you are exceedingly sorry and would like to be directed out of it as soon as possible. A variant of this method is the cringing. You voluntarily admit the fact of trespassing, apologize humbly for it, say you will not do it again, and explain that it was only great pressure of time that induced you to take what you imagined to be a short cut over somebody else's property. You know, you say, that you have no business there, and hope that, if you withdraw as rapidly as possible, no harm will come of it. This is the method most usually adopted by persons caught trespassing ; but I do not really recommend it. It is apt to infuriate the keeper and encourages him to domineer. If, however, for reasons of constitutional weakness, timidity, or some other defect this

method is adopted, it is essential that the trespasser should take the initiative. He should always himself challenge and beard the keeper ; never wait to be challenged and bearded.

At the other end of the scale there is the blustering method. You take your courage in both hands and brazen the thing out. You say that you *did* know that it was private property, but that the fact does not really interest you. Presumably the land belongs to somebody—after all, most land does—but you didn't know to whom, and you do not care. If the keeper likes, he can summon you, for which purpose you are prepared to furnish him with the necessary particulars. And drawing his attention to the board informing all and sundry that trespassers will be prosecuted, you ask him to make good its threat, say that you are willing and ready to be prosecuted and bid him act accordingly. Taking out your pocket-book you give him a false name and address and proceed. If you are a big man and the keeper is small, or, if you are in condition and a good runner, all this is, of course, unnecessary. You simply tell the keeper to go to hell, and go on your way.

Or there is the ironical method. You remark humorously that you did not know that this was private property; that, had you known it, nothing, of course, would have induced you to trespass on it; that your respect for property is, in fact, immense ; and here, you add, is a sixpence to cover the cost of any damage you may have done to blades of grass, twigs, branches or the feelings of pheasants. I myself am partial to this method, and often adopt it if in good spirits. But it requires practically incessant talking—the whole point of the method is that the keeper should be dazed and bemused by your verbal dexterity—and those inapt in words should not attempt it.

Or there is the heroic method. Affecting an indignant resentment at being stopped, you say as dramatically as

you can : ' I fought for this land for four years in the Great War. I fought, or so I was told, to keep it free, free that is, for the enjoyment of us all. By God, then, I am going to enjoy it, and neither you nor anybody else shall stop me.' The surprise occasioned by this announcement often leaves the keeper temporarily speechless, and taking advantage of his discomfiture you turn on your heel and walk with dignity away.

I have often found it useful, when caught trespassing in a park or the grounds of some large country house, to say merely that I have been to call on the inmates, and am making my way out. (I should say that I make it a practice, whenever I find myself near a country house, to walk openly on the paths or carriage drive in order to lend countenance to this suggestion.) The objection to this method, at any rate for me, arises in the difficulty of determining which should be the inmates upon whom one may most appropriately represent oneself as calling. I look, or at any rate dress, like one of the lower middle or working classes, but I talk like a gentleman. Hence the difficulty of determining the status of the inmate whom I might plausibly visit. Generally I give a name like Miss Smith, hoping thereby to be taken as indicating a housekeeper or one of the servants, but, if I know the name of the owner, I assume my governing class voice and give it. Indeed I have on occasion engaged in long conversations with keepers about the present circumstances, past history and personal peculiarities, which I have invented for their employers.

DISGUST FOR KEEPER-BAITING

YET, when all is said and done, what a sorry business it is. This skill that I have acquired enables me to trespass with comparative impunity ; yet it is a horrid

accomplishment and I would sooner be without it. I do not play the game of keeper-baiting and keeper-deluding for fun ; on the contrary, I dislike it more as I play it better. For, even when I win it, as I almost invariably do, and retire with honours from the field, the sharpening of wits, the gathering of energies, the marshalling of forces for the contest, still more the contest itself, disturb and excite, and leave me in a state of mind (or nerves) which effectively precludes the enjoyment of the country. Conflict and excitement—it is obvious—are inimical to æsthetic appreciation. One does not, after all, go into the country to wrangle with keepers. Yet, as I asked above, what is the walker to do? The area of free walkable country in the south of England, country which is neither privately owned nor infested by cars nor rashed by bungalows, is very small and yearly grows less ; the deserted places where a man may wander at will and be at peace are rapidly vanishing, and in a few years there will be none left.

LAMENT OVER A LOST PIECE OF COUNTRY

TAKE, for instance, a part of Surrey celebrated among walkers, which I happened to have known well over a period of some dozen years, the Dorking-Guildford district. In 1916 I lived for a time in a cottage near Boxhill ; the country was delightful and owing to the War not, except on Sundays, over visited. By 1919, however, it was already infested. Cars passed across Burford Bridge at the rate of forty a minute, and were drawn up in serried masses in front of the hotel. Hordes of people descended weekly, and in the summer daily, from charabancs, to uproot flowers and plants, and scatter ginger beer bottles, paper and sandwiches far and wide. The roads were strewn with primroses and blue-

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bells trodden under foot, carelessly plucked and carelessly thrown away to perish in the dust. The hill itself became a centre for every kind of hateful activity. On its summit were swings and cocoanut shies and over-worked donkeys forced to give rides to children. Its sides were covered with a scurf of litter, the refuse of innumerable picnics. For miles around the country was wired and fenced against its invaders. I moved further afield to the Gomshall and Shere district which, protected by the quite remarkable inefficiency of the Southern Railway system, preserved some rural characteristics for a few years longer. But only for a few. By 1924 Gomshall, too, was developed; bungalows sprawled, garages spawned, pseudo-peasant industries sprang up, the local pubs turned into second rate pretentious hotels, and the motors came in ever growing numbers. I retreated again southward to the Leith Hill country and made the heather wastes to the north and west of Leith Hill my main walking ground. But there, too, the flowing tide caught me up and threatened to engulf me. The Wootton Hatch hotel quickly came to rival that at Burford Bridge in the number and vulgarity of its clientèle. Friday Street became one continuous picnic, and the slopes of Leith Hill were littered with the débris of walking parties. (There is some country to the south of Leith Hill, by the way, of which I could still tell a different story, but for obvious reasons refrain.) Again I retreated, this time to the west and with Pitch Hill for my centre walked and stayed in the country to the north and west of it.

Here is the Great Hurt Wood, a great tract of woodland and moor, part of the primæval forest of the Weald. It is wild, gloomy and roadless, and except for gypsies and jays practically uninhabited. I am not over fond of it, but at least a man can be alone there, or could. To approach it from the north was for me to enter a realm of silence and of mystery. Farley Green, the

hamlet to the north, was only a handful of scattered cottages, and leaving it one felt, or with a stretch of imagination could make oneself feel, that one was leaving the known world of civilized men behind and entering an unknown land, unknown and forbidding. At the south of the wood was a windmill overlooking the Weald. This windmill came to take on for me—mind, I am not excusing my imaginative follies, merely describing them—a symbolic significance. Seen from the depth of the wood it stood for an outpost of the world of men, assuring me that it existed still, and that, could I reach it, I was safe. This, no doubt, was playing at mystery—the wood itself cannot be more than three or four miles across—nevertheless, there was a something, there still is a something, of eeriness there. But the area of eeriness grows yearly more restricted and the eeriness, such as it is, more attenuated. For even here the tide creeps on. Peaslake is an outpost of suburbia ; to the south and west an advance guard of bright new houses is being pushed up from Cranleigh and Smithwood Common, while the Wood itself is now fringed on its northern side with pseudo-antique houses in the Tudor style.

Clearly I must retreat again, and to that country to the south at which I have so indiscreetly hinted. But here I shall be too far from London for daily access, and the Saturday walk, so cleansing to the spirit, will be impracticable. Here nothing short of a week-end will serve. And so one comes reluctantly to the conclusion, a conclusion which may as well be stated here as elsewhere, that there is no really good walking country, no solitary country that is, where one may be assured of quiet and that refreshment of the spirit that quiet brings, within a day's reach of London.

THE WILD PLACES

I HAVE confined these lamentations mainly to the Home Counties, where the process of vulgarization and urbanization has proceeded furthest. But the same thing is happening in a greater or less degree all over the country. Dorset and Wiltshire are comparatively untouched—the cars hurtle through them on their way to Devon and Cornwall—but Devon and Cornwall themselves are badly infected. Their coasts are infested with resorts; their villages have become thoroughfares for charabancs; even their wild places are invaded. I have seen a stream of cars a mile long on the road by Dartmeet. Nor are cars the only enemy in the field. Such few wild places as are left are, it seems, a standing temptation to large industrial towns, who exploit them for their needs. In particular they have a *penchant* for ravishing them with waterworks. Rivers are harnessed and mountain waters collected into reservoirs. A lake in the Welsh hills is used to give electricity to Manchester, a road is threatened over the Sty Head Pass, the Lulworth Cliffs are raped by the War Office, Dartmoor is affronted by china clay works, and so on and so on.

Moreover, even upon wild places there is the blight of keepers. I have climbed Kinder Scout and been harried by persons appointed to preserve grouse for the guns of stockbrokers. I led one of them a dance for miles over that scarred plateau. All over the north Derbyshire moors the hand of the sportsman lies heavy, as it will continue to do, so long as society thinks it more important that rich business men should have opportunities for the unhampered slaughter of wild birds, than that those who made them rich should wander freely in the waste places where wild birds make their home; more important that birds should be killed, than that work-worn men and women should regain spiritual health. There is a large class of persons in this

country for whom the good life consists in the practice of depriving other creatures of life, and as this conception tends to be bred of riches, there are many moorlands and open spaces in England to which only those who are prepared to kill may have access. As for Scotland, its moors and mountains have been delivered wholesale to Americans, who sit concealed in shelters and employ what remains of the native population to drive frightened birds over their heads, in the vain endeavour to give themselves social distinction by indulging in what they mistakenly believe to have been the main pursuit of the aristocracy they have replaced.

THE ARMY

AND there is always the army. To walk across the northern half of Dartmoor is to traverse a land seamed and scarred by high explosives, pitted with shell holes and littered with the fragments of burst or exploded shells. If the army scouts catch sight of you, they forbid you access to the moor, while, even if you evade them, you yet must cross it at hazard of life. Thus many square miles of some of the loveliest wild country in the south of England are denied to the country walker, in order that the British army may perfect itself in the art of killing men from a distance. Other wild places are similarly infested. I have been compelled to make a detour of many miles in the neighbourhood of Transfynnydd in the Welsh mountains, because great tracts of country had been permanently commandeered by the army for rifle and cannon practice.

Nor is this virtual closing of the moors the worst of the evil. The army, it is, alas, well known, defiles and pollutes everything that it touches. It puts up ugly buildings, it lays down ugly paths, it destroys trees and flowers, dirties

streams, obliterates meadows and turns them into grassless wastes. Everywhere it erects barriers ; the country is stiff with fences and bristles with barbed wire. To descend into Okehampton from the heights of Dartmoor is to pass through one of the most grievous scenes in England. As you come down from the hills, you see the country below defaced by line after line of tin roofed huts, staring brick buildings, and by what appears to be a vast scarlet house. Presently your path becomes an asphalt road lined on each side with yellow stones which runs for over a mile through corrugated iron sheds, barbed wire enclosures, allotments, patches of kitchen garden with clothes drying on lines, notice boards and latrines. These latter are strictly graded according to the army hierarchy. There is, for example, a latrine labelled ' Sergeants only '

Of course all this seems more unutterably beastly than it might otherwise do by comparison with the moors one has left. ' Sergeants only ' after the view from Hamish Down is inevitably distressing, and it may be unfair to tax the British army with the contrast. Nevertheless, when all allowances are made, the fact remains that next to poultry, soldiers create more uglification, create it more quickly and create it over a wider area than any other form of living organism.

THE FUTURE

BUT this complaint has gone on long enough, and I had better stop. There exist many societies in England to-day for the preservation of the countryside, and they advocate many salutary measures. Local authorities are to be pressed to make bye-laws dealing with bungalowid growths, motorists confined to certain scheduled main roads and prohibited from driving through gates or onto

Downs. The leaving of litter is to be made a penal offence. There is to be country as well as town planning, and unregulated building is to be prohibited. A jealous eye is to be kept on the foreshore, and jazz bands, niggers, cinemas and merry-go-rounds concentrated at fixed spots. Walkers are to be given access to moorland and mountain irrespective of the needs of 'sportsmen', and large tracts of country set aside as national parks. These provisions, no doubt, are excellent, and, should they become effective, would perceptibly mitigate our present horrors. But in the present state of public opinion it is extremely unlikely that they will become effective, or that they would do more than delay a process which there is only too much reason to think inevitable. Short of a change in public opinion nothing, as I conceive, can prevent the destruction of the English countryside. To demand such a change is to demand nothing less than that we should become civilized, a contingency which, to say the least of it, seems unlikely. Hence, beyond the pleasure it has given me in the writing, this paper can serve no useful purpose.

It is always pleasant to grumble, but in this case I would prefer to have no occasion for my pleasure. It is probable that my children will see none. My generation is a survivor from a world rapidly becoming obsolete, a generation which, having known the beauty that was England's, cries out to see it pass. But our children growing up in a world of garages and bungaloids, nourished on concrete and surrounded by the monuments of the men of tin and brass, not knowing what they have lost, will not miss what they have never known.

I recently read a book written exactly a hundred years ago, the memoirs of a Mr. James Robinson, a gentleman of independent means. Mr. Robinson was a great lover of the countryside and a great walker in it. In the course of his book there is scarcely a county of England that he

does not visit, and he has a number of judicious remarks to make about the distinctive feels and smells and sights of the different types of country as he goes from one county to another. But throughout his book there runs a continuous murmur of complaint, which towards the end swells to so great a volume of protest that it dominates everything else. The railways are Mr. Robinson's bugbear. He sees great iron bonds laid over the countryside to bind and to fetter it, inhuman monsters of iron belching smoke and flames to blacken and besmirch it, clankings and grindings and shriekings and puffings to disturb its peace. This, in Mr. Robinson's view, is what the railways meant to England, and, as he inveighs against them in season and out, he concludes that the beauty of England will be irretrievably destroyed unless this defilement is stopped.

Now I rather like railways ; I cannot imagine the countryside without them, and I should not like it to be without them. And what I feel for railways my grandchildren will, no doubt, feel for all the horrors I have enumerated in this paper.

DAY TO DAY PAMPHLETS

- No. 1. **RUSSIA TO-DAY AND TO-MORROW.** By Maurice Dobb.
- No. 2. **UNEMPLOYMENT : Its Causes and their Remedies.**
By R. Trouton, with a Foreword by J. M. Keynes.
- No. 3. **THE HORRORS OF THE COUNTRYSIDE.** By C. E. M. Joad.
- No. 4. **WHAT WE SAW IN RUSSIA.** By Aneurin Bevan, M.P.,
E. J. Strachey, M.P., and George Strauss, M.P.