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# AND THE FAMILY CAME TOO!

## BACK HOME!

I WONDER IF YOU QUITE  
REALISE JUST WHAT  
ENGLAND HAS TO OFFER



by  
**H. E. BATES**

*Big-selling novelist who  
has been in the South  
Seas most of the winter*

Winter had scoured and scrubbed her. After the exotic over-ripeness of Tahiti her face was like that of a well-scrubbed schoolgirl shivering in a frosty morning. It was refreshing, but hardly seductive.

Then the primroses began. Then the first pure white flush of cherry-blossom on smoke-black boughs. Then great bursts of evening and morning thrush-song and a cuckoo calling in darkness, a good half hour before day began.

And presently the towers of white chestnuts and the running fire of bluebells in hazel copses. And all the little cottage gardens flaming with flowers.

### Tawdriness

**B**UT coming back to England is not merely coming back to a countryside. What of London?

It is no exaggeration to say that to two returning travellers with the tawdriness of New York fresh in their minds, London had about it a great queenliness.

The trees of the incomparable squares breaking into leaf, the parks full of pink cherries—and one magical glimpse of Kew on a hot afternoon with white magnolia petals dropping on emerald grass and new lilac breaking against cloudless sky.

England—I wonder if you quite realise just what you

have to offer? Is it just possible that those who stay at home are not so alert to the enchantments of this island as those who travel far away from it?

Perhaps distance has unduly sharpened my vision—but it is nevertheless true that not all my thoughts on returning home are pleasant ones.

Of course, there is now ample butter in the shops; my wife is happy, as all wives are, that shopping is no longer a bad-tempered nightmare. But we do not live by butter alone, any more than we live by butter-cups.

### Appalled

**T**HERE are other things—deeper, older, more precious. And one of my impressions on returning home is the chill thought that we are doing our perverse best to destroy some part of what they add up to—in other words, our heritage.

I am shocked at several trends. After living for some months in countries where villages are truly villages—those of Samoa, for example, are among the prettiest in the world—I am appalled to find that the character of the English village is rapidly altering—disastrously.

Everywhere a great urbanisation and suburbanisation is attacking and despoiling this thing we have always held unique.

In my own beautiful adopted county, Kent, there is now hardly a village that is not sick with the scarlet fever of a kind of jerry-building of which even the Victorians might well have been ashamed.

### Unforgivable

**A**ND as villages arrogantly spread themselves, churches of splendid antiquity fall quietly into decay. There is hardly a village church in the country that is not appealing desperately to save its fabric.

Many of these churches contain a thousand years of history. It would be a piece of sad, contemptible, unforgivable folly if they were allowed to fall into irretrievable decay.

Tahiti, they will tell you, is—or used to be—a paradise. Samoa, the Samoans say, is the original Garden of Eden.

But perhaps it is only those of us—whether we are queens or commoners—who come home from remote places, out of great distances, who quite realise what England can really mean.

**A** FEW weeks ago I was standing on a tiny coral island, on the Equator, in the middle of the Pacific, at two o'clock in the morning.

Stars of most splendid tropical brightness quivered in a warm, black sky and all about the white coral sand glittered under the light of a refuelling stratoscruiser.

A signpost under a palm tree said: "London: 11,000 miles."

Never in my life had I been so far from England.

### Fijian family

**T**WO days later my wife and I were visiting a Fijian family in their native hut. The family—children, parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles—sat about the floor on clean mats of straw. A mother nursed a brown, newborn baby.

On a side table was a picture of her Majesty the Queen. On a little dressing-table stood tins of baby powders and brushes. The baby began to cry, and the mother kissed it and crooned it back to quietness.

For some time we talked and laughed with the children and gave them sweets. They were very pleasant children, and I know that my wife like myself, was sorely missing her own.

Two days later we were in Samoa, still further from home. Rain streamed down for hour after hour like hot soup. We walked through bright red mud to visit the local school, where a line of Polynesian boys and girls sang for us, some of them Maori, and performed the long, sinuous dances of ancient invitation that even the children there seem to understand so well.

### Emotional

**A** TEACHER said: "Now the children would like to sing you in English," and at once

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for a period of five  
years. . . .

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**T**HIS law, then, shows us why Petrov did not want to make his wife a party to treason, and why the choice was much harder for her.

For both parents of Evdokia Petrova are still alive in Russia.

★ ★ ★

**T**HESE British experts believe that the flight of Soviet agents in Japan, Australia, Germany, and Norway, all within a few months, are the outward signs at last of what could be an important weakening in the Soviet Intelligence Service, made rotten by police rule.

As I see it, Beria convinced Stalin that some of his most brilliant key military Intelligence men were not to be trusted, and he staffed the foreign web increasingly with secret police agents.

Now the military men have got the upper hand in Moscow, and fear takes charge of the remotest nerve centres abroad.

It may well be that a snowball movement has started. Another big fish may come our way in the next weeks of this fantastic warfare.

## Emotional

**A** TEACHER said: "Now the children would like to sing you in English," and at once the entire class got up and sang, a strong Samoan accent, *London Bridge Is Falling*

*I am not ashamed to say that at this moment there is a stupid lump in my throat and that I could cheerfully have run home to England if there had been any way of running.*

For the next few weeks we steamed in the South Pacific. We lived under the exotic luxuriance of its amazing flowers: hibiscus, bougainvillea, orchids, lilies, gardenias, frangipani.

Then once or twice we remembered that it was March and we said: "The snowdrops will be over by now. I wonder if the daffodils have begun?"

## Not so green

**I**T was April before we were home and already the daffodils had begun. But the oaks were bare and the fields were brown. This was a slight shock to us, for naturally every Englishman believes that his country is the greenest in the world—as indeed we did, until we saw the astonishing greenness of the grass in the Pacific islands so much loved by Robert Louis Stevenson, the painter Gauguin, and the authors of "Mutiny on the Bounty."

But there was no denying it: England looked brown and bare. But also very clean and bare.

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