

Reproduced by kind permission of Evensford Productions Limited and
Pollinger Limited. Copyright © Evensford Productions Limited, 1940.

HOW TO LIVE IN THE COUNTRY

Living in the Country. By Frederick D. Smith and Barbara Wilcox. (Black. 7s. 6d.)

By H. E. BATES

Some are born in the country, and some are bombed into it. For several years we have been confronted with, and have done little about, a serious drift of population from countryside to town; now we are faced with, and again do not know quite how to tackle, the entirely opposite problem. For a generation we have had a popular spate of books representing the countryside in idyllic terms, often glibly, on the cash-in-quick basis, largely by authors who appear already to have been, as countryfolk say, "comfortable off." This literature remained carefully unaware of any problems of country life; it laughed equally at the local gaffer, the colonel's wife and the parochial committee. Just as its authors appeared to know nothing of the minimum agricultural wage, the scandal of picturesque but un-repaired cottages, the drift of labour to towns, and to care less, so they could hardly have guessed that one day the bombing aeroplane would drive into the countryside homeless people socially un-prepared, and in most other respects unfitted to face the plain problem of living, as opposed to lounging, in the country.

These people now ask: Why doesn't the refuse trolley collect the tins and rubbish? What about sewage? Where's the water-tap? Must the children go four miles to school? Do hens pay? They are even asking if it is possible to resurrect and realise that old, rosy, far-off political dream, three acres and a cow?

Questions—and Answers

To all these questions, and scores of others, all important, "Living in the Country" provides the common-sense answer. Lump together all the fancy idylls of country life published during the last decade, and the practical result will not equal a page of this book. Are you looking for a cottage? Do you fancy a term of penal servitude as a smallholder? Have you thought of raising turkeys, pigs, goats, cows, mushrooms? What about the awful people next door, the overhanging trees, the Labrador on the onion-bed—any redress? Is it legal to shoot the pheasant sitting on the pergola? Is it legal to shoot at all? Is there a living in Teas? What are the points of a horse as opposed, for example, to a bedstead? Is it illegal to trespass? Is it true, or a fallacy, that the country makes old bones, that the death-rate in county boroughs, even before blitzkriegs, was 27 per cent. higher than that in rural areas? If true, how does it square with an anti-tuberculosis report of the Ministry of Health, containing "appalling revelations of rural housing conditions"? Is it really idyllic? Is it cheaper?

Not only are all the answers in this book, but they are honest answers. The authors are a farmer and his wife: to them country life is something more than the dive-down on Friday evenings and the dash-back on Monday mornings. Their contribution to country literature is not literary; they have no capricious lyrics about the beauty of applewood fires, the luxury swimming-pool.

New Problems

They know that country life is the finest and healthiest in the world—provided you have the means to raise it above the starvation-line. They have no illusions: a slum is a slum, whether in London or the Cotswolds. They are aware that the evacuation of citizens from town to country has presented us with a social revolution, and its problems are already vast. Towards the solution of those problems, and the eternal problem of making country life healthier and happier for its permanent population, their book is an honest and realistic contribution. It cannot be too highly recommended.