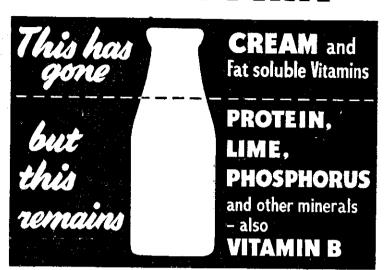
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FOG AND COTTON WOOL "Q's" Tilt at Jargon

THE NBS tribute to Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch ("Q"), broadcast from 2YA, ended with this reference to "Q's" famous tilt at writers of jargon:-Quiller-Couch's best known lecture is the one on "Jargon" in his volume The Art of Writing. There, perhaps with more wit and wisdom than have been brought together on the subject in a small space, he attacks that expense of spirit in a waste of words which is more common than the common cold—that affliction which is known as Jargon, circumlocution, verbiage, redundancy-call it anything. Those who use such words and phrases as "case," "in regard to," "in this connection"; those who cannot bear to repeat a word, but having written of "fish," must needs write of "denizens of the deep," those who use the abstract when the concrete is called for, all writers of weak, woolly English find themselves pilloried there. "In the case of John Jenkins deceased the coffin provided was of the usual character." So ran a minute of a clerk to a Board of Guardians. As Quiller-Couch says, it is wholly superfluous to tell us that John Jenkins is deceased. Actually, John Jenkins never had more than one case. and that was the coffin, and coffins have no character, usual or unusual. Quiller-Couch turns Hamlet's soliloquy into jargon: "To be, or the contrary? Whether the former or the latter be preferable would seem to admit of some difference of opinion. . ." and so on. Then he says:

"That is jargon: and to write jargon is to be perpetually shuffling around in the tog and cotton wool of abstract terms; to be for ever heark-ening like Ibsen's Peer Gynt, to the voice of the Boyg exhorting you to circumvent the difficulty, to beat the air because it is easier than to flesh your sword in the thing. The first virtue, the touchstone of a masculine style, is its use of the active verb and the concrete noun. When you write in the active voice, "They gave him a silver teapot," you write as a man. When you write "He was made the recipient of a silver teapot," you write jargon. But at the beginning set even higher store on the concrete noun. Somebody—I think it was Fitz-Gerald—once posited the question "What would have become of Christianity if Jeremy Bentham had had the writing of the Parables?" Without purusing that dreadful inquiry, I ask you to note how carefully the Parables — those exquisite short stories—speak only of "things which you can touch and see — "a sower went forth to sow," "the kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took,"-and not the Parables only, but the Sermon on the Mount and almost every verse of the Gospel. The Gospel does not, like my young essayist, fear to repeat a word, if the word be good. The Gospel says "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's" - not "Render unto Caesar the things that appertain to that potentate." The Gospel does not say "Consider the growth of the lilies," or even "Consider how the lilies grow." It says, "Consider the lilies, how they grow."