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BIRD'S EYE WORM'S EYE

What Should Our Visitors See?

(Written for "The Listener" by D.N.D.)

HOSE of us who live our strenuous but secluded lives in the suburbs often lack time and facility to express our gratitude to those able scouts whom The Listener sends out to interview celebrities we cannot meet, and to paint their portraits for us in skilful prose. Last month when your "A.A." gave us that vivid picture of Sergeant Denvir we read and marvelled, and wished for a while that we could join the Partisans, or that we could write like that, but ultimately we went on with our own jobs. Then we read "S.S." on Dr. Edith Summerskill, and this has moved us to action, because it is nearer home. Up and down our street Dr. Summerskill has been the topic of the week; we have read her speeches, been to hear her and discussed it all over teacups, telephones and front gates, and we find that "S.S." has written in her first sentence the word that we are groping towards—"disappointed."

We are not sure that it is Dr. Summerskill in whom we are disappointed, but rather in the occasion from which we had hoped so much. She has come and she has gone, and somehow contact has not been made. We are not convinced that she knows how we live. Ordinarily we do not mind this; politicians and celebrities come and go; sometimes they say sensible and stimulating things and sometimes not, but we are used to feeling as the private in the army feels, that our lives move behind a thick veil that visiting generals cannot or will not draw aside. But here was someone different; she clearly desired to understand our lives, to know why we have only two children and do not stand for Parliament.

"We Have Been Negligent"

How does one understand another country? Those of us who have been to England here recall that what we know of English life came not from visiting institutions and talking to their heads, interesting though this was; nor from week-end visits in which our entertainment was skilfully mapped out and the machinery of domestic management hidden from us by our hostess, but from the days we spent quietly living with a family whose members went about their daily business. And in our street we are now saying that we have been negligent to Dr. Summerskill (and to other such visitors). She should have come to stay with us.

Of course she would have had to sleep on the sofa, but she would never forget

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