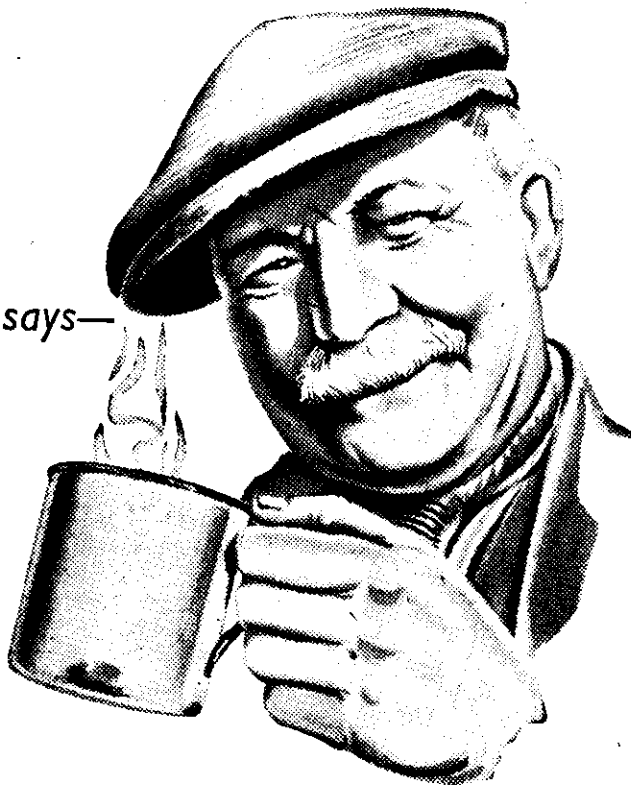
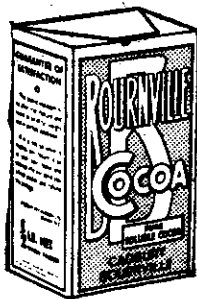


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# "STONE A War An

READERS of war comment columns, eagerly following the rush of Allied armies around Paris, can scarcely have missed noticing how several small centres mentioned have been credited with "one of the finest cathedrals in Europe." Remembering photos of famous cathedrals in places as far distant from Northern France as Cologne, Vienna and Milan (not to mention St. Basil's, Moscow, or Sancta Sophia, Istanbul!) they probably suspect the war commentators of uncritical cribbing from boastful local guide-books. However, our contributor, A.M.R., writing from personal knowledge of several cathedrals, gives reasons for saying that "finest in the world" may really apply to those in Northern France. He tells also how these Gothic cathedrals came to be built and why both sides normally go out of their way to preserve them in the thick of the fighting.

WE have in Wellington a businessman who, when he lived in Europe, used to go on pilgrimage to Chartres Cathedral. "It is," he says, "the finest building in the world," and he narrates, with strong approval, how one acquaintance abandoned his profession and country to spend the rest of his life in the building as a cleaner or door-keeper.

This cult of cathedrals sounds to some of us "sublime mysticism and nonsense." Nevertheless many hard-headed writers rate cathedral contemplation highly, and practically all who do so claim pre-eminence for Chartres or some other in the recent battle area around Paris. Joad is one. Eric Gill, another, says downrightly that he "cannot see how anyone can say that Chartres Cathedral is not the most perfectly proportioned stone building in the world, the holiest work of masonry." And when you ask him how can he know, since he has not seen every building in the world, he replies that, "only in Northern Europe was the business of building in stone rationally approached, and not much travelling is necessary to see that the choice (of best) is restricted to a very small number of buildings in a small part of Northern France."

## "A Joy and an Adventure"

These churches are of course Gothic. The Gothic style, a mystery to most of us, grew in historical fact out of nothing more unusual than attempts to make, with local stone, better-lighted and more gracefully proportioned churches. Its distinctive discovery was that vaulted roofs can be made (by "groins") to stand on a few pillars instead of resting on solid walls. This in turn made it possible to put windows where the walls had been, or else to place the walls some distance outside the pillars and use them not merely for keeping out the weather but to help in holding up the roof through buttresses "flying" high in the air between outside walls and inside pillars.

These discoveries so amazingly extended man's command over stone that the age became intoxicated with them. Building became a joy and an adventure. The people of Amiens narrowed their pillars to mere slim rods of stone and yet held a roof at 140 feet—no wood, mind you, no steel, no concrete, just stone on stone. Beauvais nearby attempted 154 feet and only after two collapses agreed to double the number