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MAKING WAR ON RATS

(continued from previous page)

'You have a rat in this room.' He said: 'How do you know?' I said: 'You pull out that right-hand bottom drawer and see.' Out popped a large rat which ran into a corner. He said: 'By Jove! It's a rat all right, and a whopper.' 'Well,' I said, 'it's certainly not a canary.' 'Now,' he said, 'how on earth did you know?'

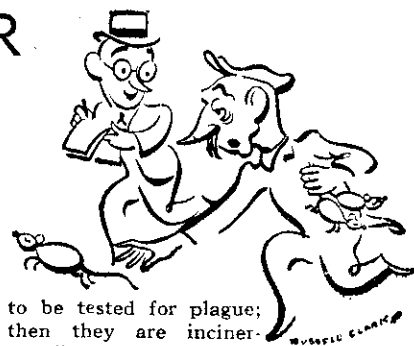
"You have," I told him, 'a very good wife who is very fond of you. Every morning when you leave for the office, she slips a couple of nice home-made biscuits into your coat pocket. You are having morning tea when a visitor is announced. You must get rid of the biscuit. You don't put it in the top drawer where all your nice stationery is kept; you hide it furtively in the bottom drawer. Pull out that drawer and see if I am right.' I was. Among the crumbs of bygone biscuits was a nest of nine young rats. He thought it was marvellous. 'There you are,' I said, 'simply nothing in it—when you know how. Every man to his calling.'

The Rat Detective took a deep pull at his cigarette. "Let me tell you something else, if you have the time to listen. There was a big office building said to be over-run with rats. They were heard but never seen. There was no food about, so what could have attracted them? That was the problem before me.

"What did I do? I went straight to the desk of a petite little blonde, opened it and there I found apple cores, lip-stick, chocolate and biscuits. A delectable feast for a rat. Now a plain girl has more sense than to fill up her desk with a lot of truck like that. In this profession you learn to discard all illusions."

"Where do you carry out your modus operandi chiefly?" (Rat - catching etymology was catching, too).

"At all sorts of places in the city. After these eight years I am surprised at nothing and nothing disgusts me. If I were to tell you. . . . But we can't mention any names. Last year I killed between 3,000 and 4,000. They go to the laboratory at the Wellington Hospital



to be tested for plague; then they are incinerated."

Mr. Procter then told me about the Two Types. They were, he explained, the Norwegian or Brown, and the Plain Black. Each required a different method of extermination. The Black, fully grown, weighed half-a-pound; the Brown went up to a pound. Cannibals, they were, the Brown eating the Black.

Expensive Poison

"Have you ever been attacked by rats?"

"Bitten once or twice when I cornered them. I've had them run up my trouser leg and out of my coat-sleeve. What would be really handy in the chase is a pea-rifle, sawn off to about the length of a revolver, but you can't use firearms in a public place."

"What is your equipment?"

"A cyanide gas-pump and some other poison costing £4 a pound. This affects the rats in such a manner that their lungs fill with water and they literally drown themselves."

"Really?" I said. So he took me into his department to inspect the canisters of poison—it looked like peach-bloom face powder. "That's the stuff to give 'em," he said. "I also use a very pliable cane which I swish over ledges and catch them a crack. They die easily. You use the cane as quickly as a flash—like a swordsman sometimes."

Mr. Procter regrets that he did not hear the recording he made recently broadcast in the 2ZB Sunday Night Gazette. "I was anxious to hear my own voice over the air—an anxiety based partly on curiosity and partly on conceit," he explained. "I could talk to you for hours about Rats and How to Catch Them. Maybe I'll be able to tell you more some other time." —E.R.B.

"BELLIGERENTLY BRITISH"

Vaughan Williams' "Sir John in Love"

VAUGHAN WILLIAMS once complained that the Englishman demands his music from any street rather than his own. His complaint was largely justified, especially as regards opera. Pre-war audiences which flocked to Covent Garden to hear Puccini and Verdi would not give British opera a hearing. Because he was even then almost a venerable composer, critics politely received Vaughan Williams' first opera, *Hugh the Drover* (1924), but it was soon forgotten.

A few years later (1929) he tried again, his second opera being *Sir John in Love*, a robust musical treatment of Shakespeare's *Merry Wives of Windsor*. When this work was presented at Sadler's Wells in April last, the audience was torn between affection for the composer and dislike of the actual performance. But Vaughan Williams took ten curtain calls with the cast.

Critics say that whatever its eventual fate, *Sir John* is strongly—even belligerently—British in character, as is most of Williams' other music.

Now 74, and a possessor of the Order of Merit, Williams was past 30 when his work for choir and orchestra *Towards the Unknown Region* was performed. He has written extensively since then, but the essence of his inspiration remains the English countryside. Looking more like a farmer than a composer, he has pronounced ideas on modern music: "I simply cannot make head or tail of this new-fangled wrong-note stuff." On one point Vaughan Williams could rest contented. The possible failure of *Sir John* would not now bother him financially. He inherited more than £90,000 from his brother in 1944.

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