

# BRITAIN'S BEST COUNTRYMAN

**Robertson Scott, Companion of Honour**

AS civilisation increases in complexity and luxury, the town tends to grow more ignorant of and indifferent to the country. Yet "the Colonel's Lady and Judy O'Grady"—the farmer's wife and the eyebrow-plucked doll of the night-club, who has never put her blood-red fingers into honest dirt—are "sisters under their skins," and the said skins, weather coarsened or shaded and creamed by art, are ultimately the product of grass. Patrons of the cocktail bar, that expense of spirit in a waste of chromium, may forget that all flesh, whether covered or not, is grass, but they cannot change the ways of nature. The truth is there for them to see, if they will but reflect, and without much trouble they can find elaborations of it which will fill their minds with profit and delight if their minds are attuned.

They might, for example—and there is no better example—read the English quarterly, *The Countryman*, which came into the news the other day because its founder and editor (until the other day when he retired) appeared in the Birthday Honours. J. W. Robertson Scott is now, like our Prime Minister, a Companion of Honour. It was said of another Scott, "C.P." of the *Manchester Guardian*, that he made righteousness readable. Robertson has made agriculture readable. *The Countryman*, a pocket-size journal packed with matter, can be read by the townsman with interest from cover to cover, advertisements included. Indeed there are townsmen scattered over the English-speaking world who rank it among the very best of magazines. There are two reasons for this.

*The Countryman* is not only technical, but human, and it is extremely well written. Mr. Scott's main purpose has

been to improve British farming—he might say, to save it—and to relate it adequately to the whole national culture. He knows well that such things as better tillage and the application of more potent sprays will not of themselves do what is wanted. The roots of people on the land must be strengthened. Their mentality must be studied, their culture preserved and extended. What is best in the past must be kept, and joined with the scientific spirit of the age. Robertson Scott perceives that the problem of the land is intellectual and spiritual as well as material. Bring the best methods to the farm. Give the farmer and the villager water and sanitation, but also better pubs and libraries and religious guidance. "The hungry sheep look up and are not fed." Town and country must understand and appreciate each other. So we find in *The Countryman* the most engaging bundles of technicalities and human contacts—ways of farming and ways of life, adventures on the land, new things and survivals, folk-lore and women's institutes, dialect sayings and searching criticism of local government, and some of the most attractive illustrations imaginable. This crusade gives far more than a local lesson. There is no country—none in the British Commonwealth at any rate—where urban-rural balance is so correct and steady that it cannot profit from *The Countryman*. There is no culture that *The Countryman* cannot strengthen by its fresh presentation of eternal values. Agricultural journalism in New Zealand has brightened in recent years by becoming more human, and it is not fanciful to suggest that this is in part the work of J. W. Robertson Scott, Companion of Honour.

—A.M.

(See photograph on front cover)

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up aloft, "if only I had my boy Frank here I could turn one of those rooms into a study!" The dear man has always wanted a study, but what with children, and Aunt Emma, and small houses, has never been able to have one. "How would you get up there?" I said. "On, Frank and I would soon fix that," he replied. Frank is the Construction Expert of the Squad. Give him two pieces of timber, a hammer, and a saw, and he can produce anything from a Meat Safe to a Motor Garage.

BUT a little thing like that wasn't going to stick Father for long. I could see that his energy was reasserting itself. One Saturday morning he disappeared for an hour, and came home with an outside in ladders, and a grim determined look. He said, "I'm going up!" "But," I remonstrated, "it may be dangerous—you'd better wait!" "I don't care if it's dangerous or not—I'm going up. There may be buried treasure up there!" "Buried" seemed hardly the right word, but I felt it was not the time to argue finer points. The kitchen table had been carried into the passage, the ladder perched precariously on top of it, and Father was on the first rung. "I'd better come too," I said.

"You can come if you like," he said, "but mind your step." He disappeared through the small manhole, and I, with no miserly anticipation of buried treasure, but with a truly feminine instinct for dead romance, followed after.

Alas for our hopes of either treasure or romance! We picked a murky way through cobwebs which hung like dirty tattered curtains, from roof to floor. There were two rooms, their sloping walls meeting at a point where a tall man could just stand upright. Straight up through the centre of one came a ubiquitous and uncannily camouflaged chimney. On the walls, still covered with remnants of paper of Victorian vintage, there were prints pinned—the Combined British Fleet on manoeuvres in the English Channel, from an Illustrated London News of 1894, and a delightful pastoral from another journal of the same year. No treasure, no glimmer of a romance—only boxes of rubbish left behind by some previous tenant for the benefit of the rats! The sum total of our discovery was the maiden name of the wife of a tenant, what bra she wore, and what cereals she gave the family for breakfast! Father threw two or three boxes down through the manhole, "That'll boil the copper next washing day, anyhow!"

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