

(continued from previous page)

ing back into the cheeks of children of the children she set out to help so many years ago.

* * *

BEFORE anyone reads this George will have left Lees Valley — not beaten like so many of the others, or worn out, or despondent; but ageing, and persuaded that the time has come to make way for youth. He is my oldest friend there,

EVERLASTING MERCY

and the closest, and I am strongly tempted to tell his full story. But I don't think he would be hurt if I told it in part.

I can't remember now how I first met him. But I remember that the first time I went to see him in his own setting there was a painted sign by his mailbox, with a thistle at the top, and the Scotsman's defiant motto printed beneath: *Nemo me impune lacessit*. But one day that sign disappeared and the single word *Welcome* took its place; welcome stranger; welcome to Island Hill. The thistle had gone, and the original George with it.

It would, I think, be squeamish to baulk at saying what had happened.

George has said it himself in a hundred ways and a hundred places. He said it when he gave up drinking and smoking and swearing. He had not done any of these things to excess, but now he does not do them at all. He said it when he started thanking God before and after every meal, wherever he was, and whatever the company happened to be. He said it when he stopped reading all books but the Bible and singing all songs but hymns: a returned soldier of the 1914-1918 war. He said it when he choked back all angry words and smothered all angry feelings whatever the provocation might be: a Scotsman reared with a thistle in his cap. He said it when he put away his radio, started speaking gently to his horses and dogs, gave God the credit when he wiped off his mortgage, and even when he got a big price for his lambs. I don't think he knows Masfield, or now ever will, but Masfield knows him:

FROM '51 to '61 I cut my teeth and took to fun.

I learned what not to be afraid of And what stuff women's lips are made of;

I learned with what a rosy feeling Good ale makes floors seem like the ceiling,

And how the moon gives shiny light To lads as roll home singing by't. My blood did leap my flesh did revel, My soul was tokened to the devil.

* * *

O WET red swathe of earth laid bare, O truth, O strength, O gleaming share, O patient eyes that watch the goal, O ploughman of the sinner's soul, O Jesus, drive the coulter deep To plough my living man from sleep.

* * *

I KNEELED there in the muddy fallow, I knew that Christ was there with Callow,

That Christ was standing there with me, That Christ had taught me what to be, That I should plough, and as I ploughed My Saviour Christ would sing aloud, And as I drove the clods apart Christ would be ploughing in my heart, Through rest-harrow and bitter roots, Through all my bad life's rotten fruits.

* * *

O CHRIST who holds the open gate, O Christ who drives the furrows straight,

O Christ, the plough, O Christ, the laughter

Of holy white birds flying after, Lo, all my heart's field red and torn, And Thou wilt bring the young green corn

The young green corn divinely springing,

The young green corn forever singing: And when the field is fresh and fair Thy blessed feet shall glitter there. And we will walk the weeded field, And tell the golden harvest's yield, The corn that makes the holy bread By which the soul of man is fed, The holy bread, the food unpriced, Thy everlasting mercy, Christ.

* * *

THE share will jar on many a stone,

Thou wilt not let me stand alone; And I shall feel (Thou wilt not fail), Thy hand on mine upon the hale.

(To be continued)

CAN WE HAVE AN "A"?

Generator Replaces Oboe

AN article in *The Listener* (June 20, 1947) by Ian Cox, informed New Zealanders that the BBC had at last adopted the international standard of concert pitch which had first been agreed on in 1939. The result is that the new standard "A" of 440 cycles per second will now be used as a tuning note by orchestras broadcasting over the BBC Third Programme. In a special programme Ian Cox introduced to English listeners a panel of experts who attempted to explain why a standard pitch was necessary, and how in the past pitch had varied astonishingly in different countries.

One speaker explained that in the 16th Century there were three distinct pitches in use. A vocal pitch (for secular songs and madrigals) was much the same as the new standard, but there was also a special pitch for Church music,

which was more than a tone higher, and another for virginals and other instruments that did not accompany voices, which was about a minor third below the vocal pitch. Even at the end of the 18th Century orchestras were tuned a semi-tone lower than they are today.

Another speaker explained that one of the biggest problems in the orchestral world was to stop the eternal fight between strings and wind, as the wind players had a firm conviction that the strings played sharp, to which the strings retorted that they only played sharp to try and keep up to the pitch of the woodwind players.

To obviate this BBC orchestras will now tune their instruments to the international standard note produced from a tone generator operated by the engineers, instead of turning to the oboe with the familiar traditional request "Can we have an 'A'?"

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