

SHE BEGS: WE BLUSH

EVER since our own meat rationing ended last November I have banished that hollow mockery, Macaroni Cheese, from the dinner menu and sat down almost every night to a chop and a-half or a slice off the joint. The news that the British meat ration had been further cut to 8d. fresh and 2d. tinned caused a momentary diminution of my enjoyment, but a visit to the grocer's the following morning, and the ordering of an additional parcel apiece for my English relatives sent me home with undiminished appetite to my flesh-pots. Most of us I suppose reacted similarly. But there are one or two people whose sense of responsibility to others is not so easily assuaged. Among them I would place Mrs. L. J. Macdonald, officially described as Secretary to the Women's Auxiliary of the National Council for Aid to Britain.

Aid for Britain is an old story, but one that it is still necessary to put over. At the moment Mrs. Macdonald's main work in connection with the campaign is the writing of the weekly 10-minute talk which is heard from the main National stations after the correspondence school session on Tuesday mornings, and, with some variations, from the ZB's in the Women's Hour on Monday afternoons. Since meeting Mrs. Macdonald I have thought it my duty to listen to the Aid for Britain talks, and have ended by finding it a positive pleasure. For there is more to them than just reiteration of the need for food parcels. They are more in the nature of an English news-letter, keeping women here in touch with women in Britain, and the listener is left with the impression that here are people worth helping. Mrs. Macdonald's main object is to contact those people who have no relatives or friends in England to send parcels to. She has garnered from various sources, chiefly from the British W.V.S., lists of needy persons who have never received a food parcel, but fresh lists keep arriving, so it looks as though her work will continue for some considerable time.

The lists make troubling reading. Apparently those hardest hit by the rationing are the aged, widows with young families (homes where there are no working adults eating "off the ration," in canteens or restaurants), and those who have not the time or the health to spend hours in queueing. Take, for example (we hope someone will), Mr. and Miss V, a brother and sister aged 80 and 78, who live on their pension and do all their own housework, or Mrs. W., a widow with four schoolboy sons, who tends to live on tea, bread and jam because the boys need more than she does, or Miss B., aged 55, who has very little money but has to stay home to look after her bedridden parents.

Country Volunteers

But Mrs. Macdonald is optimistic about her ability to cope with the flood of addresses, since there is always a steady flow of volunteers for parcel sending, mostly from the countrywomen



who listen every Tuesday to the Correspondence School and are still there when the Aid for Britain talk comes on. She has had one or two major triumphs to look back on—several women's organisations have adopted London nurseries and send parcels in bulk to the children. Then there was her successful "bagging" of Cicely Courtneidge for the session, and a near miss in the case of Lady Olivier, whose manager took his guard duty very seriously.

And Aid for Britain has its lighter side. Mrs. Macdonald tells me that she got a certain amount of satisfaction from the research work conducted by the Auxiliary and a dietitian from the Health Department into the suitability of various tinned foods for inclusion in overseas parcels. The research occupied several lunch-hours, and the foods were classified according to food-value, flavour, and appearance. The report seems to have borne fruit in that manufacturers are now concentrating on producing tins of meat rather than tins of meat and vegetable. Mrs. Macdonald thinks that now the ration has been reduced again meat is the most important thing to send. Even in normal times meat is twice as dear in England as it is here. For the weekly 8d. it is possible to buy one chop, and husband and wife together can get ¾lb. of mince with their weekly one and fourpence.

"The encouraging thing is that everyone here is so anxious to help," said Mrs. Macdonald. "And it's understandable when you read the letters we get back." (I had heard several read in the Tuesday morning sessions, and remembered particularly the mother who was intending to call her new daughter after the sender of the parcel, who was also requested to stand godmother).

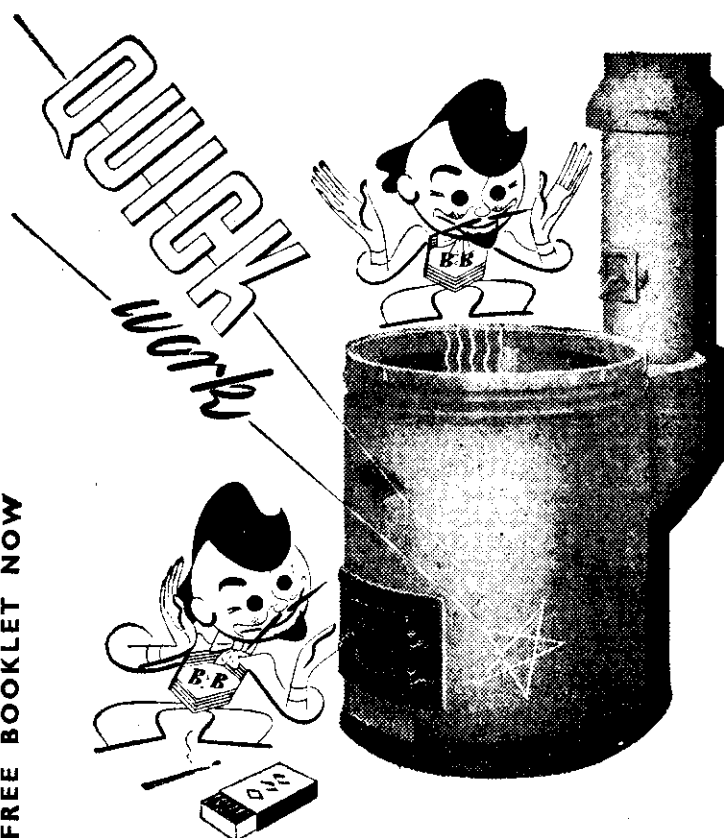
"Of course," concluded Mrs. Macdonald, "I realise that food parcels are only a drop in the ocean. It's just that they're such a very necessary drop."

—M.B.

Good Advice

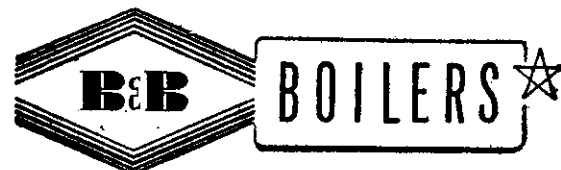
"DISRAELI wrote and said many good things and some of them still live. He wrote: 'You know who the critics are? The men who have failed in literature and art.' He described Sir Robert Peel as having caught his opponents bathing and walked away with their clothes. Although he once lamented 'I get duller every day,' he never did. He generally followed his own advice — be amusing, never tell unkind stories, above all, never tell long ones."—A. P. Ryan, former Controller of the BBC News Division, giving some of his favourite passages from English literature.

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