

# TO WIN THE WAR

Written For "The Listener" By L.A.B.

**W**E'RE rather a conservative lot, we farmers. The good old routine growing of cereals, roots, and grasses contents us. We do not indulge in wild adventures in our fields. This does not mean that we despise the knowledge won by, for instance, the research workers at the Wheat Institute, or are blind to the advantage of following faithfully the recommendations

of the Grassland Commission. We sow certified seed in our potato paddocks. But we are reluctant to branch out into the raising of crops—age-old perhaps—which are not generally grown in New Zealand.

So when my neighbour heard over the radio in the News Session that the Government was counting on receiving the support of farmers in growing linseed or

"linen flax" for Great Britain to assist in the war effort, he was visibly disturbed.

"Damn it!" he muttered, scratching vaguely at his thin locks. "Just what does that mean? I'm pretty well stocked up with sheep, and there's only the bit I usually put in wheat or roots — was hoping to get it down in wheat last month—but it's still too wet."

"Excellent! Just the very place to grow linseed."

In my anxiety to convince him that there was really every prospect of producing excellent linen flax on his par-

ticular land, I read out a very detailed account of research into this very problem in the "Journal of Agriculture."

"March, 1940," he commented gravely at the end of my reading, "that's fairly recent, and sounds pretty fair. Do you really know anything about it yourself? Ever grown any, and how did it pan out?"

Replying in order of his questions, I modestly answered, "A little — not as much as the officers of the Department, of course—but... Yes! Twenty-odd years ago, and it panned out very well for us, but not so well for the merchant who bought our seed."

"An' where does this stuff come from generally—the seed, I mean?"

Without confessing that I had recently looked the matter up, I went on unblushingly, hoping that my information was reasonably up-to-date. "Well, North and South America, Russia, India, and in a lesser degree Ireland, Italy, and I fancy Poland all produce linseed; and of course Canada is included in the American area. In North America it is generally known as 'duluth,' Canada's quota as 'manitoba,' Argentine's as 'la plata,' while 'Chilean' seed comes mainly from Bolivia... Oh! And Morocco and Turkey too, produce what is known as very clean seed and can be used for direct feeding — not having had any oil expressed."

"My gosh!" was the reward I received for this last effort.

"But here," he went on, "what I'd really like to know is how you got on with your lot, and if it really pays to grow—not that I'd care so much, for this flax stuff is needed for airplanes and things. A fellow's got to do something to win the war; but it would be sort of encouraging to hear some real experience in growing it."

Thinking a little uneasily of the carefully arranged data of the official growings, I told briefly how, twenty years ago, since we took over a farm rather late in the season, we had been unable to sow wheat in autumn and did not care to risk a spring sowing. So as a sort of catch crop we had sown the well cultivated area in linseed (for seed, not fibre harvesting). Then, as now, linseed was subject to very violent fluctuations in price. The fairly heavy crop was successfully harvested, and a sample taken to a local grain merchant who purchased the lot at the very handsome price of £40 per ton. Immediately after the bargain was completed the office telephone rang. Linseed had dropped that day £19 per ton.

"Well! How about it?" we asked. "How do we stand now with this new information you've received?"

Diogenes need not have gone any further with his little lantern, for the honest man replied: "The bargain was made two minutes ago. You get your £40!"

"By God! £40 a ton! But what had the fellow Diogenes to do with it? Sounds like a dago to me."

"Oh! He didn't really come into the transaction, but I wouldn't expect £40 again. Miracles don't happen every day. Still, I would give it a go on your bit of wheat land."

"Blessed if I don't, too. You never know your luck."

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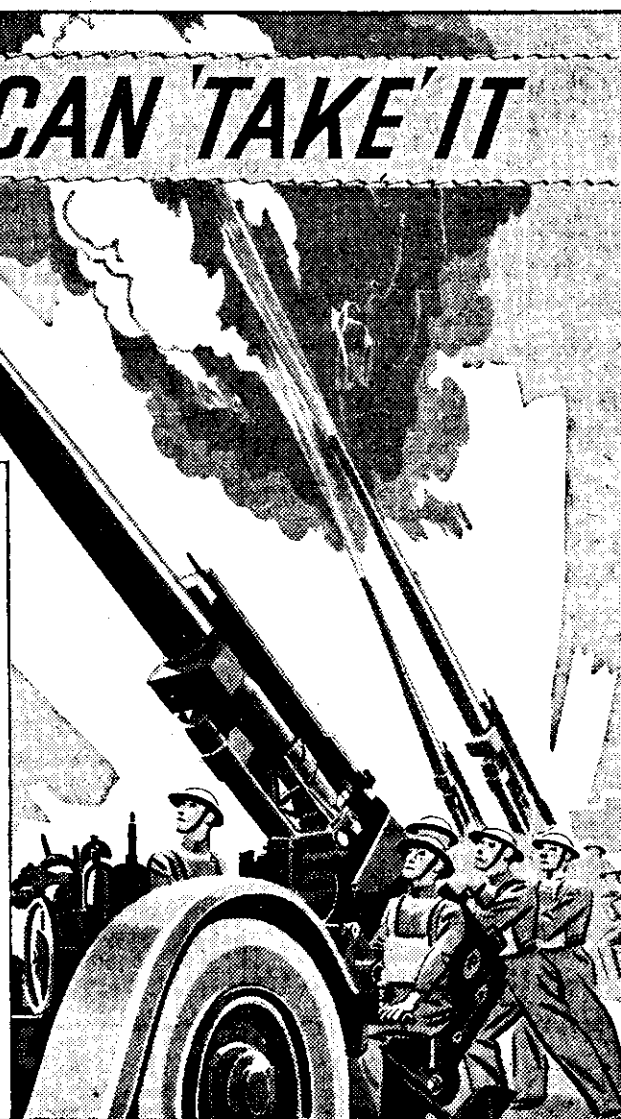
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