

HIS SUBJECT IS FOOD

—And He Will Bite At Nothing Else

IT is not quite true that radio is saving the people of Britain from starvation, but we are assured by Mr. W. Bankes Amery, principal Assistant Secretary to the British Ministry of Food, that without the use of the air, there would have been incredible difficulties in changing the eating habit of the public fast enough to beat Hitler's submarines.

Mr. Amery visited Wellington last week to discuss food problems with the New Zealand Government, and for the duration of the war will be in New Zealand or Australia in continuous conference with Ministers and Marketing Departments. He is not here, he assured *The Listener*, in a brief interview, to discuss post-war problems. His task begins and ends with maintaining the flow of food until the war is won.

"Food is my subject, not politics. I believe in fighting one war at a time. What the future holds no man can say, but if it is to hold anything worth while, we must win the war and not lose it. I am here to help in winning it."

"You would not care to express an opinion about possibilities — whether, for example, Britain, which is now producing so much more food than was produced a year or two back, will go on producing equal or larger quantities after the war."

"No. Guessing does not interest me. The problems of the moment are more exciting."

"Exciting?"

"Certainly. It's a wonderful adventure I am engaged in. Think of it. Forty millions threatened with starvation, and so far not even injured!"

"You can really feel that the health of the people has been maintained?"

Figure-Improvement

"Beyond any question. Their health and their heart. They have in many cases, been made to feel better—easier under the waist-coats, for example, with advantage to their pockets as well as to their figures. But it has, of course, been a tremendous job to regulate supplies to meet all requirements, and that is why I say it could hardly have been done without radio."

"How much broadcasting is done? Do people not tire of continuous propaganda and refuse to listen?"

"They do and they don't. They tire of long exhortations—or would if we offered them. But we don't. We take the air for five minutes at 8.15 every morning, and that is one of the most popular sessions of the whole week. Of course we make these talks as bright as possible—sometimes dramatise them, sometimes light them up with humour. But the lesson is always there, and tens of thousands of housewives wait for it every morning in the week, and every week in the year."

Food Advice Centres

"You are, of course, not suggesting that radio is your only medium of communication?"

"Heavens, no! We use the newspapers, films, posters—all the recognised ways of getting our message across. One of our most successful ventures has been



W. BANKES AMERY, C.B.E., has been in direct or indirect contact with the Dominions for 27 years. At present he is principal Assistant Secretary to the British Ministry of Food. Before the war, he was Assistant Secretary to the Dominions Office. He will remain in Australia and New Zealand till the war ends

the opening of food advice centres in the leading cities and towns. We take a shop or an office, display food and cooking utensils and charts in the windows, and have somebody inside capable of demonstrating and answering questions. We have been extraordinarily fortunate here in having Howard Marshall to do the organising for us, and I was selfishly sorry the other day to see in a newspaper that he has apparently gone to North Africa as an observer or reporter. But the work will go on. It is too well established now to be disturbed by a change in personnel."

It was impossible not to catch some of Mr. Amery's own enthusiasm. Why stop when the war ends, we asked. This was health education on a national scale. Surely it would continue?

"Of course it will. So, I hope, will the moral education. To-day, for the first time, the vast majority of the British people know what waste means. Food waste is regarded as a crime. What they don't eat they still save for pigs or poultry; and pigs or poultry eventually get it. Then they eat the pigs and the poultry, and you have something like economy on a national scale. These lessons will not be lost."

Not to be Diverted

"But you are still not disposed to discuss the effect of all this on the post-war flow of trade? Take us here in New

Zealand. We send you nearly all our cheese, a great quantity of our butter, and far more than half of our mutton and wool. Will you not express an opinion about the situation of our farmers if your demand in Britain declines?"

"We shall jump that ditch when we come to it. We are not there yet. And when we do have to get across we shall do it together. We know in Britain that we can count on New Zealand's goodwill. You know that you can count on Britain's goodwill. Why worry ourselves about troubles that may never come? Why let our thoughts be distracted when there are problems at hand that require all our concentration and energy?"

"You quite refuse to bite?"

"I do. I am not here to take or lay baits. I am here to help, and to obtain help, in outwitting the Axis pirates. My subject, I told you, is food—yours as well as ours. I am not going to be diverted even by your earthquakes. It will perhaps amuse you to know that I felt one last night for the first time in my life!"

EARN A FEW POUNDS

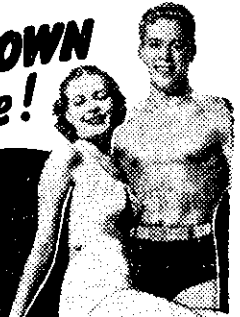
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