



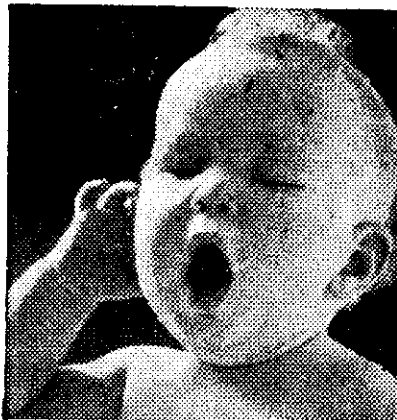
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EUROPE, ASIA AND ANTIPODES —AND FRUIT

PERHAPS it was the sunshine, the cold tang in the air reminiscent of spring, but indicative of autumn, that made a trip to the market seem attractive on this particular morning. Perhaps it was the prospect of filling those empty preserving jars and jam jars. "Bring me back a nice fat pig," my youngest called out, "and mind you come back jiggy jig."

"Mum's going to get fruit, silly, and I hope she gets peaches that we can have lots of, not one at a time out of a bag."

B grade, BF—no, not what you think! Then his eye lost its human look, and glazed over, and he began in that bewildering crescendo. "Ate-I-got-ate-I-got-ate-I-got an-tee-an-tee-an-tee-an-tee an-a-half-an-a-half-an-a-half, nine-it-is-nine - it-is-nine-it-is-nine-it-is-nine-it-is— and so on until he paused for breath and the man with the chalk began drawing hieroglyphics on the cases again.

A comfortable looking housewife was standing near watching proceedings with as little apparent interest as every one else. But she looked more approachable



"Ate-I-got-ate-I-got-ate, nine-it-is-nine-it-is-nine-it-is . . ." and so on until he paused for breath

Well, here I was. Cases and cases and cases of them. Peaches, apples, pears, grapes—how the family mouths would water to see the purple bunches as they were lifted from their cases—and tons of tomatoes, round, ripe or "coloured," peeping through the slats. And everywhere invigorating bustle, barrows pushing here and there, Chinese shouldering their cases or dragging sacks, and all away with them to a background of cheerful auctioneering.

I came up to one little group of people standing round a pile of cases.

"Gilly-gilly-gilly-gilly-gilly-gotse, gilly-gilly-gilly-gotz, gilly-gilly-gilly-gilly-gotz, gilly-guff, gilly-guff, gilly-guff, gobble-gobble - gobble - gobble - gotz. GOTZ," shouted the auctioneer, from the top of the steps on which he was sitting.

One of the market hands quietly chalked numbers on the sides of the cases every time the auctioneer paused for breath. The clustered group of fruiterers, Chinese, Indian, Italian, and New Zealand, stood around as though they had no interest in the world or in what was going on. Yet somehow out of this incomprehensible noise came all the stocking up of our fruit and vegetable shops.

A case was prised open. It was full of fairly ripe golden peaches. Half a dozen hands, white, brown, and yellow, reached for a sample.

"Hi, there, easy on!" called out the auctioneer. "You haven't bought them yet. They're pip-top! Best Golden Eagle.

than my fruiterer from down the road, who, though prepared to welcome me as his nearest and dearest in his shop, was looking at me with cold displeasure.

"Could you tell me what they are wanting for these cases of peaches?" I asked, in the voice of a humble novice.

"Ten and six, and cheap at that," she said. "But they all snap them up before you can take them."

I looked round at the good-natured and bored faces and wondered just where the snapping up came in.

"Can't you out-bid or something?" I asked. "I always thought in an auction you could get what you wanted if you bid for it."

"Bless you, I never bid when I come to the market. I might get let in for a whole shop full of fruit if I were to make the mistake of letting the auctioneer catch my eye. That's why we are careful to look the other way. I only want a bit of fruit to set the family up in jam and preserves. I've six, and all working, so we need jam in plenty."

"How do you get your fruit if you don't bid?" I asked, feeling rather foolish.

"That's O.K., dearie, I'll show you. You just wait until there is a lot auctioned at one price and the bidder doesn't take the whole lot, and then you put in for one or as many cases as you like of the ones that are left. Look, this looks hopeful—26 in one lot. You're not likely to get all those bought, and Golden Queens. They're the best you can buy for bottling."

"Two to go, two to go, two to go," shouted the auctioneer.

"I'll have one," I called out, excitedly.

"What name?"

What did one say? How could one shout out something so private and personal as one's own name, across that sea of faces.

"All right then. 'R.S.V.P.'" said the auctioneer, with a grin. "We haven't got all day to wait while you remember it."

My friend of a moment before came to the rescue. "That's all right. You just go along to the office and ask for R.S.V.P. and they'll give you the bill, and when you have paid it, you can collect your fruit and take it home. There are some good tomatoes over there. You come along and have a look at them."

And so from one market to another. Here in a corner were immense sacks of pumpkins with great shining red globes bulging from the top, and seated on one munching a large slice of pink melon, was a solemn-looking little Chinese boy, his eyes watching father while his mouth worked on at the melon. Some young housewives were looking at cases of lettuces, fresh and crisp, picked and packed overnight. I'd like a case of those," said one. "We

(Continued on next page)

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