

Poor Father Christmas!

(Written for "The Listener" by DR. MURIEL BELL, Nutritionist to the Health Department)

IT is all very well to complain about the shortage of petrol, but how would you like to be Father Christmas and have to walk? There are no reports about Santa's reindeer in particular, but we may have our fears when, as an indication of what is happening, we learn through the Norwegian Telegraph Agency that the Germans have ordered a surrender of a quarter of the available reindeer herds, or about 35,000 animals in the most northern regions of Norway and Lapland. In sub-Arctic lands, the reindeer is a staple source of flesh, leather, fats, milk and transport. Rather convenient for Santa Claus in normal times to stop and have a milkshake en route.

There is an extraordinary variety in the type of animal that human beings use for supplying milk; there is the water-buffalo in Egypt, the camel in Arabia, the mare in Mongolia, the llama in Peru, the yak in Tibet, the sheep in Spain, and the goat in Mediterranean countries.

(Memo: Must keep a goat; it gives nice, rich milk which might easily act as a substitute for cream—a valuable way of getting luxuries in wartime without breaking the regulations! There are further advantages in that the goat will save the effort of mowing the lawn. Not so good if I have to do the milking night and morning. Alternatively, there is the thought of going home in time to milk the ewe. Rather back-bending after the day's work. Just as bad as having to stand to milk a camel).

When climatic conditions make it impossible to keep cows, the human race seems to go to a good deal of bother to obtain milk from other animals. In the light of which, we are lucky to have the right type of climate; and it follows that we are very lucky to have a ration of half a pound of butter. There are ways and ways of tightening the belt. In England, one method which is said to have been used in the first year of the war, according to medical literature, was the compulsion brought about by the loss of from three to seven pounds in weight by many adults. There is a fair proportion of our own population who would benefit by this sort of tightening of the belt.

To return to the cow, if not to the reindeer, it is interesting to compare, from the agricultural point of view, the amount of human food produced by a given weight of animal fodder. Animals vary in their efficiency in transforming feeding-stuffs into food for human beings. Sir John Orr puts the relative efficiency of the different animals down as follows:—Milk cow, 5; pig, 8; hen, 15; beef cattle, 20.

He then goes on to point the lesson that "we should concentrate first on milk production."

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