

LIVES IN SOLITUDE

IT had not occurred to me, until I read it recently in an article on bees by Dr. Colin Butler, that, with a few notable exceptions, insects are solitary. The exceptions are, of course, bees themselves, ants, and wasps, and the few other insects that live their lives in colonies. All other insects live alone, with no desire for company (except during their brief mating period), and no capacity for it. And in a large number of cases mating is dying

—by murder, as in the case of spiders, though these are not insects, or by simple biological exhaustion.

It is an arresting thought—perhaps not depressing, but certainly sobering—that the most numerous of the creatures that share our world with us can't even communicate with one another. It would indeed be a terrifying thought if they had anything to communicate; but they have no more interest in one another than grains of sand have for other grains when the wind blows them together.

I find it difficult to grasp this fact of complete solitariness in living creatures however small. I accept it for the reason given by Dr. Butler—that no system of

by "SUNDOWNER"

communication exists, or can exist, among myriads of creatures that we must call living, and because they live, must regard as fellow mortals. But my mind yields with a struggle, and my imagination fails altogether. Even when they swarm, as in the case of flies round a corpse or mosquitoes round a warm living body enclosed in a net, the individuals have no interest in the other individuals circling and buzzing about them, but only in the meal they all equally seek. If all men and women in the world were struck blind and deaf and dumb it would still be a peopled world if our other senses remained; but the insect world is a world of individuals unconscious of, and unconcerned with, all other individuals except during courtship. That is something to think about when the white butterflies are here.

I WAS in my twenties before I saw a ewe lamb; in my sixties before I lambed one myself. Now schoolboys do it before breakfast. At seven this morning I saw two brothers—one I should think twelve, the other fourteen—walking quietly without a dog through their

father's ewes. They were keeping a chain or two apart, and watching as the ewes moved back past them. Half way across the paddock one pointed to the left and moved off that way, accelerating a little, but not running. The other slowed down, easing the sheep still in front of him towards his brother and the fence, until in a few minutes there was a small mob moving along the boundary to the corner made by a cross fence, still without panic or rushing. Here the brothers closed in, let about half the mob escape in dribbles right and left, then rushed one ewe and with some trouble held her and threw her.

What followed I could not see in detail, and could not describe in detail if I had seen it. But I could see the ewe on her side, one boy on his knees, and in three or four minutes—perhaps a little longer—a rapid and simultaneous retreat by the two boys for 30 or 40 yards. There they stood watching for a few minutes, and when the ewe still did not get up, they started back towards her, but slowly and cautiously. This brought her to her feet; and as she ran in one direction they ran in the other direction, still watching over their shoulders. Then the ewe stopped, looked back, and returned to the spot where they had held her. There I could see her cleaning the

lamb the boys had delivered, and the boys, now satisfied, moving off again on their round.

All that was missing was a bishop on one side of me and a psychologist on the other to interpret what I had seen. What I thought I saw was a deterioration in the health of sheep in 60 years, but a great advance in the education, health, and wholesomeness of boys.

HERE is a paragraph on which I would, if I could, cast some doubt. I found in *A Diary with Letters* by

Thomas Jones, C.H., published about a year ago by the Oxford Press and lent to me by a collector of good books, Ernest Adams:

I have now heard the excellent record made by Lloyd George at Broadcasting House on 15 February, 1934, of his speech at Aberystwyth Eisteddfod on 17 August, 1916. His pace in this repeat performance was 87 words per minute. Churchill measured in 1909 on the Budget was 111, and in 1940 on the collapse of France 111. Asquith in 1909 on the Budget was 78. King George V in his Christmas Day message in 1932, 79; Ramsay MacDonald in an election speech in 1929, 115; Attlee in 1947, 134; Roosevelt's Fireside Talks around 100; Wynford Vaughan Thomas's descriptive commentary, 1944, 165; Middleton, 1944, "In Your Garden," 182.

It would be impudence to question a Welshman—I think, and hope, still living—who has been advisor to four English Prime Ministers, Deputy-Secretary of their Cabinets, the discreet friend for 20 years of everybody of importance in Whitehall, a professor of Economics in Ireland, a selector of professors in Scotland, England, and Wales, and the Guardian of more political secrets than anyone else now living. What he says on this matter must be true. But if anyone finds it an easy truth I hope he will try speaking continuously for half an hour at 78 words a minute.

There have been two, and I think only two, orators in the House of Commons during the last 50 years, Lloyd George and Winston Churchill, and I find it astonishing that the first spoke so much more slowly than the second. I find it almost incredible that he could hold himself down to 87 words a minute and still keep a firm grip on an audience. But that is oratory: not a torrent of words, which may or may not be wise words; not noise, or dramatic variations in noise; not brilliance, or fluency, or humour, or wit. None of those things alone, and none of them very much. Oratory is magnetism, personality, words that warm and draw and hold the listener and never let him go. Eloquence (continued on next page)



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