



# BACK FROM THE HOLS—

Some Afterthoughts by F. W. CRADDOCK

EXCEPT for the idle rich, who are now so rare as to be more than ever conspicuous and less than ever worth envying, the month of January marks the end of the holiday season and the beginning of the process variously described as "picking up the threads" or "settling down to solid toil again." These brave words are uttered with a wry smile and a mock heartiness; but both are so nicely controlled as not to obscure the feeling of martyrdom which one tries but always fails to convey. Martyrdom, as everyone knows, is suffered mainly during the holidays.

Of course, the conservatives who not only spent Christmas at home but also stuck to the English tradition of roast turkey and plum pudding and all that goes with it, have recovered from their dietary excesses and are now little the worse for their holiday. Not so the more adventurous.

Throughout the gloom of the preceding winter thousands of sedentary

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side of the ground opposite the commentators' box. One commentator, unperturbed by the fact that he didn't know who the competitors were, started a smooth commentary with only distant relation to the race being run. This was early in the running before he could identify the athletes. But even at the end of the second lap he had a German out in front until it was kindly pointed out to him that the German was, in fact, a British runner. Unruffled by this he informed his listeners that the "German" was now tiring badly and dropping back, and having neatly disposed of him he brought the British runner with a burst up into the front.

These extemporisations, incidentally, were among English-speaking commentators. No doubt events occurred among the other 140-odd commentators, who were all cramped in one stand talking thirty or forty languages. One hates to think what would have happened if the technicians hadn't been on top of their jobs.

workers told themselves and their friends that, despite appearances to the contrary, they were really sun-worshippers at heart. Since early October they have gazed at pamphlets and posters in the windows of the travel agencies and decided that a skin like that of a Hawaiian surf-rider would be appropriate. So white limbs and torsos were exposed to chill winds and watery sunshine on Labour Day "just to toughen up the old epidermis" in readiness for some real sunbathing in January. Now it is all over. Having nursed their blisters, they discover that three weeks of sun and sandflies have produced nothing better than freckled shoulders and strips of dead skin.

Then there is the pseudo-hardy type, the exponent of the rigorous, outdoor life, who boasted of his preference for sleeping on the ground and in other ways getting close to Nature. His storm-proof tent blew down the first night. As he says, a man must have something to do during the long winter evenings; so he has decided to build a caravan. The enthusiastic caravanner whose home away from home got stuck in the sand has already booked at the hotel for next year.

In the Summerless South the front lawn has become rank pasture: docks and dandelions toss their swollen heads in open defiance of hormones. It will be necessary to borrow a scythe. In the Winterless North the area formerly occupied by lawn looks like a piece of the Sahara or a recent harbour reclamation. Small boys and large birds have combined to strip the gooseberry and currant bushes; the neighbours forgot to feed the cat but remembered the invitation to help themselves to lettuces and green peas; and something which had somehow been overlooked in the refrigerator obviously died shortly after the power was switched off.

But there are compensations. When Dad's watch slipped out of his vest pocket and dropped through the decking of the wharf he didn't mind a bit. He said that it never was a good time-keeper, and that he was jolly glad to be rid of it. Considering the triviality of his loss it was funny that he should keep on asking why there should always be such large gaps between the planks on wharves. He kept on talking about harbour boards and harbour engineers the whole afternoon. It was all most interesting. Until then I had no idea that our ports and seaside resorts were so badly managed.

Talking of watches: Ronnie was really rather lucky, too. He forgot to remove his wristlet watch before going in for a swim. Must have got a teeny weeny little bit of sand or something caught in the works. But the watchmaker said that it only needed a completely new inside to make it as good as ever. It's a funny thing, but Jimmy's nice new pocket knife went in much the same way as Dad's old watch. It slipped off a rock when he was fishing. But he and Ronnie had been squabbling about whose turn it was to cut up the bait, so it was really rather a blessing.

After trying to untangle them from the seaweed at low tide, we decided to leave the fishing lines. Who would

want to make a fuss about the loss of a few miserable hooks and silly old sinkers? Anyhow, why not just sit and look at the water? I can't see what difference holding a bit of string makes.

As for the tiny tots: have you ever stopped to think how well their simple pleasures are catered for and how truly the holiday spirit is epitomised by the ubiquitous bucket and spade? As every father knows, the

buckets are rather cunningly designed so that the handles drop off during the first morning on the beach. From this thoughtful provision on the part of the manufacturers a number of advantages follow. A handleless bucket cannot be swung at an adversary—it must be thrown. Consequently only one assault is usually possible, and the aim is generally inaccurate. Of course, if the missile does not wreck its intended purpose at the first throw it may fall into the hands of the enemy who, pausing only to fill it with wet sand, may retaliate. Yet, on the whole, less blood is shed.

Again, without the handle the bucket is actually better for building castles; because, unless it is very skilfully managed, the handle scrapes the top off the castle just as the bucket is being lifted clear. Thoughtful parents gently remove any handles which cling obstinately to buckets when the castle-building stage is reached. The speed with which castles of great perfection can then be built provides an irresistible temptation to other children. To feel a castle pouring up between one's bare toes while watching the expression on the builder's face is indeed an enriching experience. From the parent's point of view the resumption of hostilities gives a welcome respite from insistent demands for ice cream.

I should have mentioned that for carrying water it is better to have a handle. Otherwise the bucket must be clutched to the bosom. Handicapped in this way the dear little soul will often reach his objective only to discover that the bucket is empty, most of the water having disappeared into the rompers en route. Therefore, my advice to the little ones is that baby brother's head should be cooled and Uncle's boots should be filled up at the first opportunity while handles are still in the attached phase.

In my youth it was possible to buy iron spades. Not having seen them for years I presume that their importation has been prohibited at the request of the Health Department or the St. John Ambulance Association. The iron spade had several advantages. For instance, its sharp blade made easy work of building harbours, breakwaters, and forts, or demolishing those built by others; if one forgot it for a moment it did not float away on the tide; finally, a mere novice could split open a skull with it very neatly at one blow. Scenes of carnage on our lovely beaches are now comparatively rare; but I am sure that there is more thwarting of primitive urges.

In its general shape, the thickness of its cutting edge and the roundness of its corners, the modern, wooden variety does indeed conform to the legal definition of "a blunt instrument." But here any resemblance to a weapon ends. Attempt just a playful tap on any passing toddler's head and the miserable thing breaks in half. I suppose it is all part of what is called social amelioration. But who will be so bold as to assert that the seeds of juvenile delinquency are not sown in the sands of infantile frustration?

