

of gannets as bold or reckless navigators, and must, in many hundreds of cases every year, pay for their boldness with their lives.

[T is not necessary to travel farther than our own windows at present to see what rain can do when the thermometer is high. We have all heard, or read, or seen that rain in low latitude deserts is followed almost at once by a miracle—flowers and fragrance that a few hours earlier had no existence. Canterbury is not the tropics.

MARCH 28 It is from 43 to 45 South, and miracles here come slowly. But they do come; and during the last three weeks, with six inches of rain and the thermometer at, or above, or very little below 70 day or night, there has been a more rapid transformation than I have ever noticed before. Bare patches of earth are disappearing under grass; dying trees have put out new shoots; autumn leaves are being pushed off from within; carrots and parsnips are putting on new tops; oats sown a month ago in my garden to be dug in before spring are waving now in the wind. But the most impressive sight of all is the sensational change of colour on dry pastures: deep green where cover was absent or very short, biscuit and green where the rank growth of a wet spring was not fed off or mowed but just drooped and died and whitened and lingered on waiting for the frost. Now the new growth has shelter from sun and wind, and although it will not defy the frost it will survive the first mild attacks.

It is surprises like these that make old men young again. Instead of feeling Browning's fog in our throats we listen for the lark on the wing and look for the snail on the thorn. But the matter goes deeper than that if grass is our bread and our butter and our jam. Then we jingle pennies in our pockets as we walk about and tell ourselves that they will soon be shillings. We beam at our neighbours and are reconciled, in our minds, with our enemies. But in a day or two we look about again and ask ourselves when we saw so many white butterflies; why the tomatoes are wilting and the young cabbage plants have disappeared; what is wrong with the cherry trees and who has shot all the leaves off the spindle-wood. One discovery leads to another, one anxiety to another, and in half an hour we know that we have never, however far back we go, seen as many beetles or as many grubs, as many woodlice or as many caterpillars, as many moths or as many butterflies as are holding high holiday under our feet and over our heads and in every direction round about us. We can't milk our cows in peace because flies bite their legs. We can't turn our backs on our sheep in case maggots appear in their wool. It is the pests' carnival year, the *annus mirabilis* for winged and crawling nuisances. The miracle is wearing thin. We shall not be sorry when the rain goes and the thermometer drops to zero.

(To be continued)

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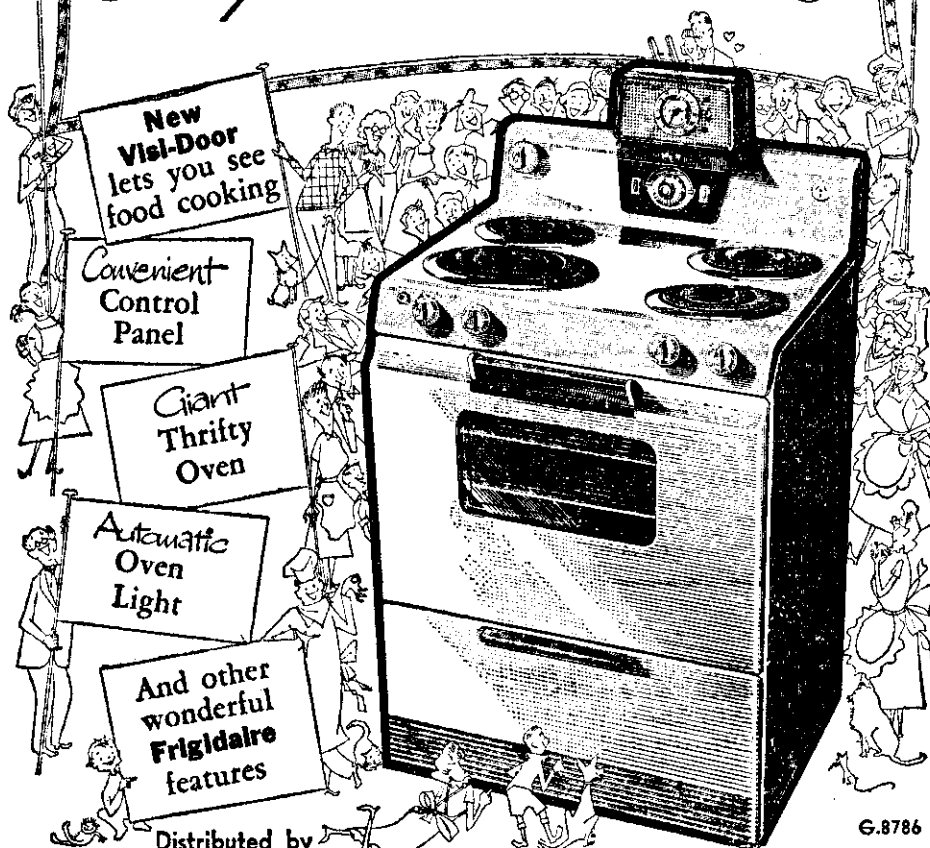
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