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SHEPHERD'S CALENDAR

A Light Extinguished

by "SUNDOWNER"

BETWEEN Burnham and Ashburton last week I saw a cow rocking and rolling. I don't know whether the rain had got under her skin or the sight of a ploughed paddock had run away with her senses, but she was going down on one knee and then on the other, at each descent burying a horn in the ground, groaning, and lashing her tail. It was such a ridiculous

MARCH 29 performance that I stopped my car to watch, but all I could think after five mad minutes was that she had come from a byre equipped with radio. I have not yet seen a rock and roll performance by sub-humans, but in the antics of that brindle cow, the energy wasted, and the nuisance deliberately created—in the nicely turned furrows there was soon a dry wallow and packed stamping ground—I was sure I had a perfect illustration, grunts and all, of an adolescent mystery on TV. I don't sing to my cows as I milk them, or whistle, or croon. If I could give them TV it would be love's labour lost, since they half close their eyes when the milk begins to flow and do not fully open them again till I get up. But there must be precocious cows as there are precocious boys and girls, and I think that cow had soft music while the pulsators worked and wanted something faster and more furious. Either that, or she was full of ragwort and tutu and was not sure whether to lie down and die peacefully or let the earth know first that she was coming.

oraries will remember in 10 or 15 years. He was casual in creation, careless, except now and again, in comment and criticism. Because he took life lightly and allowed himself few moments of solemnity he gave the impression that there was more above the surface than below it. He wrote, spoke, and lived moment by moment rather than day by day or year by year. It is possible that he really was rich soil for only a few inches down. But that would still leave him where he has been for many years—looking down on most of us with a kind but wicked smile, making jokes about us and ridiculing us, and now and again destroying some pretender with a savage thrust. I can't help regarding his death as an unrelieved calamity: a light extinguished on an already dim street, with nothing in sight to replace it. It will be candles and matches for a long time now where there used to be light from a dynamo.

* * *

I DON'T want to boast, or swagger, or trail my coat, or thumb my nose. I feel as humble as my dog looks when he is creeping back to my feet after I have ordered him out of licking distance. I know that lofty looks will be humbled and haughtiness bowed down. But I am bold enough to think, and childish enough to say,

MARCH 31 that the most attentive listener this morning

to Arnold Wall's symposium on the rabbit was sitting within a hundred miles of my own chair. I have lived with rabbits as long as I have lived with my own hair and my own teeth; and a little longer. I have murdered them, pardoned them, petted them, tortured them, committed a thousand unpardonable sins for and against them. But tomorrow is April Fool's Day, and I am not sure yet whose day it will be. It will certainly be ours if through selfishness or sentimentality we make it any other day than that from which to date the last rabbit.

Meanwhile, I am not happy about it. Though it is easier to prove the

I NEVER knew A. R. D. Fairburn well enough to call him by his Christian name. I have none of his books, nor can I remember anything he wrote clearly enough to bring him to life again in print. But I had many indirect contacts with him—letters, telephone conversations, and the brief fellowship an arresting

MARCH 30 article establishes until it is displaced by something else—and the news of his death still seems unreal. Even though the information has now reached me that death was not a surprise to him, it is bewildering to me, and deeply distressing. Some of us seem to be created to die as clearly as some seem created to live. We are never fully alive, or gladly awake. A.R.D.F. was exuberantly alive every day. The hours were too short for him, the excitements too continuous. Yet if he could live again I am sure he would spend himself a second time as recklessly and as generously as he did the first time, interesting himself only in the process and very little in the result. Nor am I one of those who think such a performance disappointing. In relation to his sparkling ability—the word should be abilities—he may seem to have done very little that his contemp-



"The biggest threat to ducks is not the gun but the dragline . . ."



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