

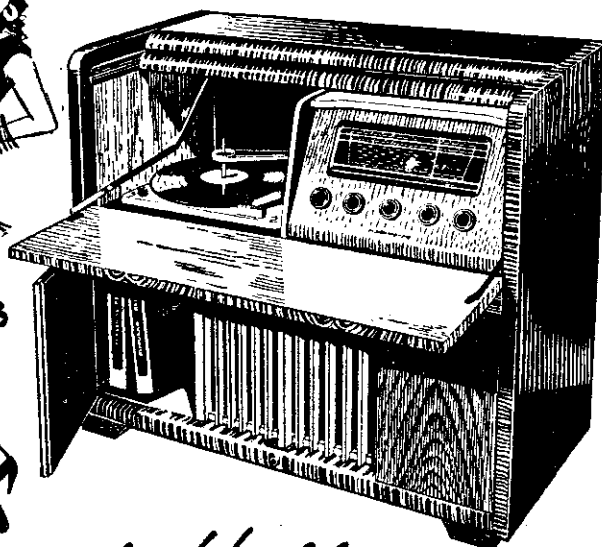
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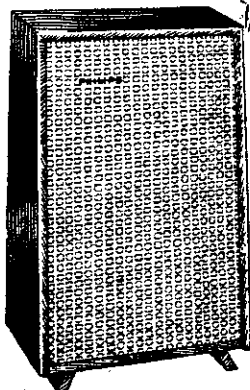
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SHEPHERD'S CALENDAR

Blue Days & Grey

by "SUNDOWNER"

WHEN Dr Bombard was halfway over the Atlantic, living on raw fish, plankton, and small draughts of salt water, in his heroic attempt to prove that ship-wrecked sailors need not die, or die so soon, he decided to call it a good day when nothing dreadful happened (such as catching no fish, being overwhelmed by a wave, losing an oar, getting becalmed, or circled by whales and sharks). I am not dependant on plankton or raw fish, threatened by the sea or monsters in the sea, sipping salt water, or lost in uncharted space. But relatively dreadful things happen to me and to all of us, and our good days are those on which we forget our troubles. It is a good day to me at present when a sheep does not die lambing, when my cow delivers her calf safely, when my roof does not leak or my dog break his leg or my debts overtake my income or my disks slip or my mind dwell on vain things. It was a good day in youth when the Devil did not tempt me beyond my strength or duty or custom rob me of pleasure. Happiness then was the excess of well-being over woe. It is seldom much more than that to any of us—seldom constant or completely satisfying or a secure package of comfort and peace. It no sooner comes than we fear that it will go—if we have memories and minds susceptible to shadows.

But the alternative to all that would be the dullness of our animals. I think it was George Eliot who said that the serenity of some people—or it may have been their silence—is the serenity of a hen sitting on an added egg. I am sure that the indifference of some of the people I know to the fears and shadows of life is a complete incapacity to feel them. Dr Bombard had hourly reasons for feeling them. He had committed himself to an experiment for mankind that called for more faith than a famished man can preserve. His science might tell him that he was safe, but his flesh and blood and nerves and midnight

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fears gave him no such sense of security. None of us can feel secure if our minds dwell on the dangers of life or remember its deceptions and disappointments. If we were perfectly healthy we would not see those dark places, or seeing them, not dwell on them. But few of us are as healthy as that physically or mentally. We are as prone to alarms, most of them groundless, as the day-old calf that sees me as a monster, the lamb just waking from sleep whose eyes see my eyes, the bird that has come in my bedroom window and can't see its way out, the baby rabbit palpitating in my hand, the trapped rat or the imprisoned cat. The longer I live with animals the more clearly I see that growing up is little more than conquering fear and enjoying life without anxiety.

I FOUND it refreshing the other day to be told in a letter from a refined, educated, and severely reticent farmer's wife that she hopes to persuade her husband to continue running a bull. She is fighting in a lost cause, as we all are when we resist gainful assaults on nature—battery hens, for example, and unseasonably-shorn sheep—but I like forlorn causes and the forlorn fighters who stand up for them. As a method of producing the greatest number of good-quality animals in the shortest possible time artificial insemination outdoes nature many times over. It is therefore justifiable, in some countries necessary, and in all countries here to stay. But I find it morally offensive and aesthetically disgusting.

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It is in fact morally offensive to me to interfere with nature in many other accepted ways. I do it because I don't know what else to do. When I sterilise my cat my excuse is that the alternatives are a half-life or no life at all. When I keep hens without a rooster I am without excuse except the miserable few pence a week the male bird eats. When I destroy female cats and sentence my dog to pathological celibacy my excuse is that I avoid a multitude of killings in days to come. When I unsex my ram lambs and bull calves my excuse is that others will if I don't, and that if nobody does it animal farming will end in chaos. But the artificial insemination of animals which the farmer is not trying to improve, does not wish to improve, and will sell or kill before any improvement can show itself, is a perverted and unnecessary use of science.

Fortunately an indispensable aid to the method is the possession of a telephone; and I have no telephone. Though there are telephones not far away, and I am not squeamish any longer about the facts of life, I am still not remote enough from my morbid Puritan background to burst in on a neighbour's wife and ask her to telephone the Herd Improvement Association that Elsie wants to hear from them immediately.



ALAIN BOMBARD
Hourly reasons for fear

I HAVE very little sympathy with those who are affronted by a typed instead of a hand-written personal letter.
(continued on next page)