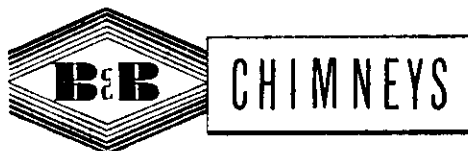


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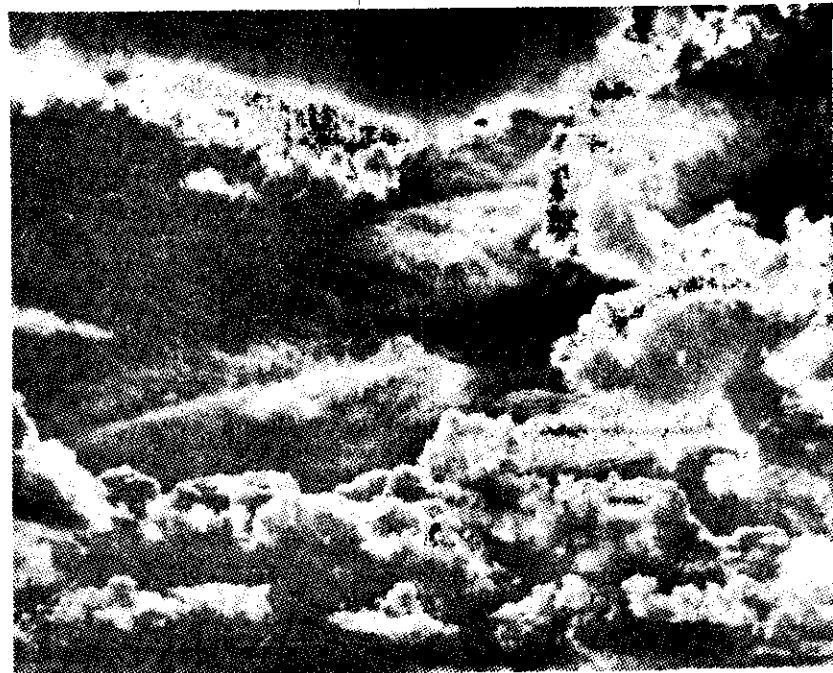
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## Mirrors Sparkle



W 41



N.P.S. photograph

## SHEPHERD'S CALENDAR

# Rhythm and Rainfall

by "SUNDOWNER"

BECAUSE I had something to do with L. G. D. Acland's decision to write the story of the Early Canterbury Runs, two friends who have had a great deal to do with the re-issue of the story—one as Editor and the other as Literary Executor—presented me the other day with a copy of the complete re-

**MARCH 11** revised edition: a heart-warming gift in spite of my feeling that I had done so little to earn it. But greed and semantics settled my scruples. Gifts, I reflected, are not earned. They are given. It was necessary to accept to encourage my friends in virtue. If I had deserved the gesture, they would in a sense have owed it to me; or some one would. But they owed me nothing. No one in the world owes me anything on Acland's account, on his publisher's account, or on the account of his friends and admirers. The obligation is all the other way—as it must be between all authors and grateful readers. So when my wits came to the rescue of my wobbling conscience I pasted the gracious accompanying letter on the last page, and by that time was feeling so virtuous myself that I regretted not putting it on the inside of the cover at the front.

Well, Acland is worth more than a mass to me; more than two or three masses. He saw something that no one else saw so clearly: several things: first that the story of Canterbury would for a long time be the story of the men who put sheep on its tussocks; second that the record was fading; third that today's indifference would be tomorrow's frustration. It is possible, as some one proved the other day in London, to find a needle in a haystack. But the finding would have been easier, faster and more certain if the needle had carried a thread. Acland threaded the needles. When Canterbury's children's children are no longer content to think that they just grew, that their towns and cities just grew, and their own clothes, houses,

and bank accounts, it will be Acland who will show them the way back to the beginning. The threads are there: very colourful threads, too, some of them, but coloured or plain enduring now that they have been soaked in printer's ink.

**MARCH 13** NOW that the season of mists and heavy dew has come again I find myself wondering if we gain as much moisture at night as we have for weeks been losing by day. Evaporation is a never-ending puzzle to me, and surprise. Is it perpetual motion, a coming and going eternally from the sea to the land and the land to the sea, or are there halts sometimes, gains and losses sometimes, that for ever upset the balance? What has happened to the water that once fell regularly on the Sahara, and where did the rain come from that last year filled Australia's Lake Eyre? If it came from the sea where has it been during all the years since water flowed and gathered there before—riding high over Australia itself or falling on our own West Coast?

Physical science is too dark for me, its facts too hard to catch and too slippery to hold. But I gather that no one yet has caught enough weather facts in Central Australia to be able to say even approximately how often, over a period of years, rain will fall in sufficient quantities to give runholders a gambler's chance of survival. Here is a passage from C. T. Madigan's fascinating account of a camel journey across the Dead Heart in 1939:

I made extensive investigations in the country from Lake Eyre to Birdsville in 1929 and again in 1939. The first (1929) was the worst drought year the country had ever known. The mean recording of the eleven rain gauges then in operation was 1.8 inches, with one station as low as 70 points. Lake Eyre was absolutely dry, just three thousand square miles of pink and dusty salt, and there was scarcely a beast on its feet in the country. . . 1939, on the

(continued on next page)