

Not so Deep as a Well

by "SUNDOWNER"

I CAN'T remember how footrot came up at the dinner table, but it did. Jim, I was saying, argued that the germ got into the bloodstream, and was not destroyed by treating the feet.

"Does he think we are wasting our time with bluestone?"

"No, but he thinks he JUNE 1 will be disappointed. He says that it is hopeless to aim at eradication."

"You don't agree with him, do you?"

"No, I don't. Jim knows a lot more about footrot than I do, but in this case I think he is wrong. I suspect that he is being deliberately perverse."

"Stop talking about him, both of you! Your best friend, and you say all that about him!"

It was the voice of six, and I was not sure whether to ignore her, reprove her, or firmly repress her. But we stopped talking about Jim.

I HOPE it is not lese-majesty to knit during a coronation ceremony or a sin against God to have busy hands during the lessons and the prayers. If it is, I am an accomplice in the crime, since I have received a pair of gloves knitted on the night of June 2. But I will take the risk. These gloves were not put together stitch by stitch or thought by thought. They grew on my kind friend's needles as leaves grow on the sleeping trees. Though I have never seen a woman knitting and saying her prayers, I am sure that many do so. I have seen them knitting and reading, knitting and listening intently to

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in the following week. When he came home in the middle of a golden afternoon the seat beside him was not empty as usual. A grizzled head showed through the window and a wrinkled face, thin and shrunken as an old dried nut, looked out with a shining delight on the hills and the river and the long track winding away up the slope.

In the morning Take came down the track to the store. His toes savoured the feel of the good earth under them, and his eyes dwelt with a deep content on the shimmer of the river under the willows and the hills that towered up like the sides of a canyon, rich with every shade of green. Tinny trotted at his heels, and in his kit he carried his lines and his traps for the tuna.

He sat down on the totara bench and lit his old black pipe, and Bill, measuring out the flour and sugar, smiled and cocked an ear at the door.

"Hey, Take, you back already?"

"Kapai the town, eh, Take? Why you come back so soon?"

Take's voice had a shining mellowness, like the sun on old polished wood. It flowed with a deep happiness.

"Oh, he the good place, the town. Good for holiday, every time. No good to live. This the only place to live. No place like home, eh?"

music, knitting and flying through space knitting and suckling babies. Sometimes, having no such sedative available myself, I have been annoyed, but I don't think it would worry me if I were a preacher and women brought their needles with them when they came to church (especially a church in which the congregation's part is passive). I have heard a politician complain of the rudeness of knitting at a public meeting, but I have never thought it rudeness myself. It could be rudeness if knitting were an intellectual exercise.

The number of automatic knitters is, of course, becoming smaller each year. Unless television brings them to life again, there will soon be no knitters capable of the speed and detachment that gave me my gloves. It is a dying art, and if it disappears altogether the world will be just as comfortable. But I hope the death will be delayed a little. If a fire or a thief robbed me tonight of all my woollen underwear the only items I would grieve over would be two pairs of warm socks from the same set of needles.

I AM beginning to wonder if scoffing at water diviners is a permissible pastime for the poor. In three days it has cost me £50 and brought me no water, though my well is down 75 feet, and the drill now rattles ominously on rock. What lies below the rock, or on either side of it, only a diviner would pretend to know, but even

JUNE 5 if I thought he did know it would cost me another £50 to prove him right or wrong. What it would cost to eat

humble pie in his presence I am not going to say in the meantime.

But it is diviners, geologists, or the "practical" men who have learnt nothing and forgotten nothing since they first helped their grandfathers; those three and no others. The diviners would have said "Sink here" or "Sink there," and they might or might not have been right. Their guess would have been as good as mine, and as it has turned out, no more expensive. The geologists could not have told me (without tests beyond my resources) that there was a rock 75 feet below the surface in the direct line of the drill. They could have told me how promising or unpromising my selected spot was, and if I had been wise I would have consulted them; but if I had shown them a well 50 feet east of my bore, and on the same level, with another 50 yards west, and still on the same level, it is extremely unlikely that they would have warned me off the spot I finally selected. Nor is it certain that I would have accepted their advice if that had been its nature. The practical men showed their good sense by saying nothing and accepting no responsibility. The bungler was the man who called the tune before he had come to terms with the piper. Tomorrow we test the persuasive powers of gelignite.

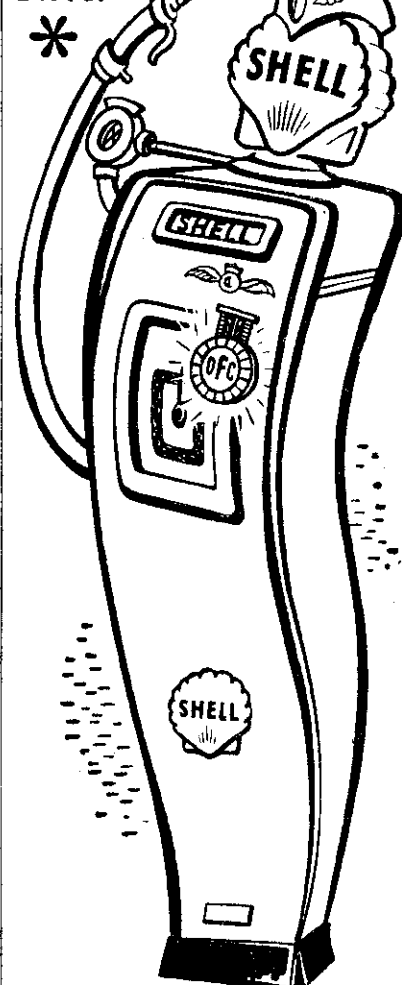
IN a book by an anonymous author sent to me this week by an anonymous reader, I came on evidence that English villagers as late as 1844 (when my own father was a boy of fourteen in Surrey) still believed "that cocks sometimes lay eggs; and that if one of these be deposited in a dung-hill, it will produce a basilisk or winged serpent."

JUNE 6 Though the author himself scoffs at the belief, he is a little guarded in explaining it away. Cocks' eggs, he says, are eggs of diminutive size laid by old hens which have turned masculine in appearance; but it is a long jump from an incomplete and always infertile egg to a fabulous monster. In Pliny and other ancient writers on natural history the egg was, I think, hatched by a serpent, and this no doubt gave it its deadly powers. The cockatrices of the Bible, on the other hand, could have been any kind of snake or venomous reptile. But I have never known what to make of the creature mentioned by Chaucer and Shakespeare, and I suppose by many other writers whom I have never read. The one feature they seem to have had in common was an evil eye.

My anonymous author adds in a footnote that Gilbert White has discussed the subject at length in one of his Selborne Letters; but I have not been able to trace the reference, and I find it difficult to believe that I would forget such a letter if I had once read it. I would be as little likely to forget it as I would the battery fowls (if I had seen them) at the Poultry Show this week which sit all day and all night in pigeon holes too small to walk about in and produce eggs under pressure till they are exhausted. I would like to have Gilbert White's comment on these.

(To be continued)

FLYING-OFFICER SHELL D.F.C.



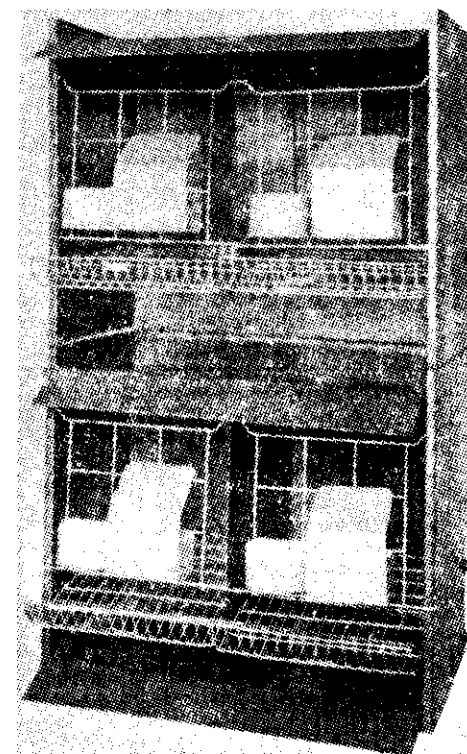
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BATTERY LAYING PEN

What would Gilbert White have thought?

