

TWICE-BORN LAMB

by "SUNDOWNER"

WHEN I went round my sheep this afternoon I took my rifle with me, and rifles make trespassers of most of us. I saw a black rabbit watching me at a range of perhaps 200 yards, and to get within shooting distance I crossed the boundary fence and crept round a neighbour's hill. Then I forgot the rabbit. I came on a ewe in a little hollow, bleating as ewes bleat when they no longer expect an answer, and eating as they eat when they have gone several hours hungry. She was moving in a circle round a rush, and as I stopped and watched her I remembered Guthrie-Smith's "placer" lamb, and wondered if the process was ever reversed; if there could be "placer" ewes, who feed in circles round their dead lambs and never again join the rest of the flock. But when I went to find the lamb there was nothing — neither a stillborn one, which I expected, nor the remains of something older and more firmly rooted in its mother's emotions. I was beginning to think that the lamb had perhaps not been born, and that the ewe was

suffering the temporary lunacy of a mother-about-to-be.

Then a faint sound came from almost under my feet, and I realised that the lamb had slipped into an under-runner 15 or 20 feet higher up, and had worked downhill to the point where I was standing. I discovered, in fact, that there was a small hole near my feet, a vertical chimney about two feet deep, not big enough to let a lamb in, but big enough when I had pulled a little earth away to let me drag a lamb out. It was the happiest moment of the day when I succeeded after a struggle in reaching an ear, then a jaw, and at last in giving a bedraggled but still vigorous lamb its second birth in 48 hours.

I THINK it was Barrie who said about some celebrity (perhaps Lord Rosebery) that the first time he saw him he threw a clod at him. I threw a clod some years ago that I did not know to be a clod at a good and wise man whom I did not know to be my target. I hit him in full view of his associates and friends, and the time has not come yet to explain and apologise. But I dreamt last night that I

AUGUST 26

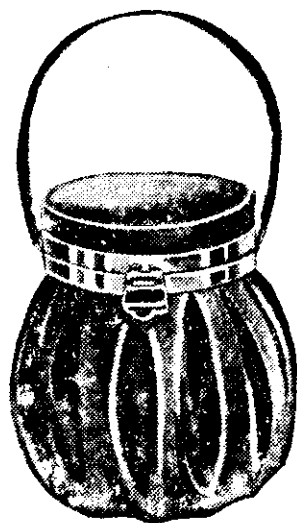
went to his house, and before I could even say why I had come he made it clear that I need not have come. He had known everything from the start, had understood, and harboured no resentment. I awoke feeling very uncomfortable.

Now, an hour or two later, I am still trying to get that dream stuff out of my system. I have not been understood or forgiven, and if I had been I would still be unhappy. I threw the clod because I was too dull at the moment to see what I was doing. In other words, my innocence was stupidity, and I find it less painful to be suspected of malice than to be unmasked as a fool. Nor do I want to be such stuff as dreams are made on, morally. Not yet. I have been converted too often, awake and asleep; filled with a melting benevolence, and then left shivering in the cold. If I have to go to sleep to

(continued on next page)



On the nose, an Achilles heel?



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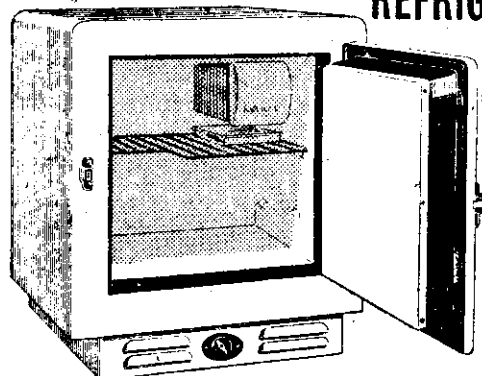
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