

Outside the hotel a few cars are parked and an occasional truck. A dozen or so horses are tethered beside the nearest fence. A wife waits patiently for her man to come out and drive on to the store, perhaps two miles away. The proprietress shows the rest of the women round the garden. Children play in the backyard, and if they leave the gate open cattle or sheep are liable to stray into the property. The atmosphere is one of leisurely well-being. In the tea-rooms, travellers from town gaze open-mouthed at the great piles

of food put before them, and with something of the same astonishment at strange country characters, whose weekly visit to the hotel is perhaps the sole relaxation in a busy and solitary existence. Drovers rub shoulders with boundary-riders. In the bar a pleasant hum testifies to the contentment of the men.

It is typical of our paradoxical era that the most civilized drinking takes place farthest from what townsmen are pleased to call civilization.



By 234949

GR<sup>EAT</sup> THINGS, manoeuvres. Hours of waiting, hours of driving in convoy, hours in the sun flat on the sweet-smelling grass. Assaulting strongpoints in force, strategic withdrawals, getting captured, going hungry when the travelling kitchen was lost, cutting loose in some one's apple orchard—oh yes, manoeuvres were splendid when you look back, but how we detested them then! After the scarcity of leave, the rigidity of discipline, and the inadequacy of pay, manoeuvres were the most obnoxious feature of Army life.

For one thing there was all the flapdoodle and solemnity before the jamboree came off. "Manoeuvres"—like the name of a disease—was banded from mouth to mouth in a whisper for weeks beforehand. But none knew when or where—none except the orderly-room wallahs, that is, and they maintained a discreet security silence. Maybe even they didn't know, but wanted to pretend they did. Suspense like this might go on for weeks, months even, and then sometimes the whole scare would peter out with the vague commentary: "The

Brigadier's been changed; the new bloke isn't keen on manoeuvres."

More often, however, the months of suspense would blow up in a sudden order to pack for a two weeks' stunt. Platoon commanders would get mobile, and read out long catalogues of things to be taken and other things which were on no account to be taken. Specialists, like Sigs., Transport, and Vickers, had to hold a secretive and hasty autopsy on gear. Cooks had to brush the cobwebs from those cumbrous and sooty chariots, the portable kitchens. In something like half an hour after the intimation had been given, every jot of equipment had to be in trim and every man had to be outside his tent loaded down like a travelling bagman. That was organization for you. How we hated organization.

Then followed the idle wait for the trucks. For some reason the transport section and the rest of us never synchronized. It seemed to me that they thought of themselves as the aristocracy of the Army and, as such, complied with aristocratic etiquette by always being late. When they did bump up to the