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ENGLISH FOLK LEAD NEW KIND OF FREE AND EASY LIFE

(By Margaret Butcher)

ing about the onions when out came and you can't tell me that it doesn't his wife and whispered: "Auntie's simplify life quite a lot! come back. She's had an accident. She's been knocked down by a bi-

happening, people can still be knocked down by bicycles. It seems to be the fate of poor old ladies. We hurried into the lounge - I was expecting I hardly know what: a battered and slightly hysterical victim, I think. But not a bit of it. There she sat in the most comfortable chair: a very frail old lady, pale and sweet, her black frock newly brushed, her thin hands quietly folded in her lap.

"Don't worry, please," she said. "It hasn't given me concussion or anything." All the same, there was a grim-looking bruise on her temple, and I couldn't help feeling that, in her place, I should have been bawling about it quite considerably.

I left my host agitatedly dialling for a doctor, and when I called later Auntie was tucked up in bed, despite her protests.

CLIMBED DOWN LADDER

"She's brave, isn't she?" I remarked; and then they told me something else. Quite a lot of disagreeable things have happened to that old lady just lately. She has come from London where, on a certain dreadful night, she sat up listening to the sounds of the worst of blitzes. And then, when it seemed to be over ... a direct hit, right on the block of flats where she lived. She had to climb down a ladder from the burning building, and just got away with her life.

"we looked out of the window and carrying a little handbag. It was all she had left in the world. She'd hung on to that bag all through, with her bankbook and a few papers in it. And she's been with us ever

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Here is another of those inimit- | Several times lately I have seen able letters from Margaret Butcher, her passing, pushing the baby in its English novelist, which tells of the perambulator, and looking as if no- lating through the wall for hours on way in which ordinarry, every day thing in the least alarming had ever end. folks of the British Islands are ac- happened to her. We had a little commodating themselves to the exi- chat one afternoon, but it was all gencies of the war time. This letter about the baby, I remember. There was written specially for The Mid- wasn't one single word about blitzes. land Free Press and The Liberal. So today, as a gesture of friendship, Reading, England .- Yesterday I I ran round with my butter ration. met a very charming old lady - It was very hard work to make her though the manner of our meeting take it, but I won. Isn't it odd? was not as fortunate as it might There was a time when one would I suppose: they are all real ones and, have been. In fact, her arrival at have popped in with a bunch of her niece's home caused us quite a flowers, perhaps, or a magazine, but bit of consternation. There was I, this coupon business has made all walking round the garden with my the difference. Now a ration of host, admiring the kale, commiserat- butter ranks as a handsome gift;

BROKEN BISCUITS

We are still a wee bit fussy at times, of course. Personally, I go It is ridiculous that, with so much on turning up my foolish nose at beef, parsnips and herrings in tomato sauce; yet who knows? I may be smacking my lips over all of i before we're through. There is the little matter of "broken biscuits," for example. There was a time when one regarded them as something the juveniles bought with that twopence; now we say to each other, in confidence: "My dear, I know where one can buy broken biscuits," and off we rush, hot-foot. And what's the matter with broken biscuits, anyway? At least they are perfectly fresh, and they'd be broken, anyway, as soon as one set teeth to them. Yes, we're shedding quite a lot of

nonsense where food is concerned. (Incidentally, where do the unbroken biscuits go? You can search

During our chat I discovered an affinity with my host and hostess. At his office, it appears, there are men with big gardens and all kinds of things to spare. Almost any morning somebody may say: "Could you do with a few carrots, old man?" "So," explained my host, "I said, 'Don't bother to ask me, old chap. As long as it isn't parsnips bring !

it along'."

Only this morning, for instance, I traded half a marrow for a little pot of home-made jam. And so we rub along, comfortably enough. This new free and easy business is working wonderfully. You don't have to "The next day," said my hostess, be introduced any more: I don't, anyhow. If I see somebody I like saw her walking up the path here, the look of - well, that's good enough. There is a word or two over a garden-fence, or in the local store, or in the bus, and from that moment it's plain sailing. At about the third meeting, possibly, one remembers to ask the person's name, but it's not important. Frankly, that suits me, and it's beginning to suit quite a lot of folk who, till now, had no idea what fun it is. Most of us have no spare cash, in these days, for amusements that must be bought. We get our amusement out of a talk and a cup of tea; we chucker over our makeshift methods with clothes, our adventures on our allotments, the quaintness of landladies. We have even learned how to take bad news, knowing - by now - that it must

A SKETCHING PARTY

come sometimes.

On my free day last week four of us tripped off in a little sketching party. The Newspaper Man came, taking a well-earned rest from his hectic work in London, and he got so thoroughly tangled up in the matter of perspective that all such things as blitzes were forgotten. We had a grand time, though the Gardening Partner, running true to form, was inclined to pessimism. His own drawing of an elm-tree caused him to anticipate immediate arrest as an enemy agent taking notes of strategic importance.

"I don't see why," I objected. "Oh, I don't know!" he said. "I can see one of the Home Guard coming over, taking a look at it and saying, 'That's nowhere near here.' I should be suspected at once."

We dropped in for a cup of tea at a place where the waitress knows me, and we chatted a while. Somebody else, it transpired, who has x 8.18 a.m. 'been through it' and had a miraculous escape. Who would think it to look at her? A quiet, auburn-haired a-Daily except Sat., Sun. & Hol. woman with smiling eyes. One knows these people for a long time before one hears any details. "I'm one of the lucky ones," she said. "We had two direct hits, but we got away with a bit of scrambling." And then she hurried along to attend to somebody else. Their chief trouble,

think, is broken sleep. It takes a long spell to restore them to normal sleeping hours. "You get so used to going without it in London," she said. "After a time you almost forget how to sleep." Yet you don't hear any of the ordinary peace-time moaning about wakefulness. "It'll be all right in time," they say. There is none of that old-fashioned wailing that 'I never closed my eyes all night" - and usually after one has heard the heartiest of snores perco-

LESS NEURASTHENIA

An American commentator told us, on the radio, that a doctor friend over here had informed him that there is actually less neurasthenia in this country than before the warand I believe him. There are no imaginary dangers and worries now, as such, they can be brought into the open. The ordinary citizen hasn't time to fret about unhappy relationships or fancied illnesses. He is on his toes; his to-morrows - if there are any - must take care of themselves. Of course, the malade imaginaire is still with us to some extent; there are still people who regard the upsettings of war-time as a direct affront to their notoriously poor health, but their Public has dwindled to a disheartening extent. Folk have not time now to sit up and listen to symptom-talk. They are far more likely to observe, with astringent briskness, that the invalid would be far better doing a little job of some sort.' In some ways, indeed, this old war is filling a long-felt want. WHEN WILL IT COME?

I wonder how many of us will ever have real homes again? Here we are, huddled into bed-sitting rooms, sharing other folks' houses, renting spare corners rigged out with alien furniture, having to take turns with kitchens and bathrooms. Some day, we shall be our own masters again, I suppose; we shall be able to use a typewriter or turn on a radio without causing complaints. We shall be able to send our things grandly to a laundry instead of doing a little furtive washing n a basin and hanging it up on a walking stick suspended in the corner. We shall pull down the placard on 'How To Tackle Fire Bombs' from the wall and take the gas-mask from its nail by the dressing-table; we shall slip cosily into bed without the preliminary laying out-in readiness for emergency - of the coat, the stout shoes, the attache-case of personal belongings. We shall take down those black-out curtains and let some air into our rooms o' nights; we shall scrap our bicycles (not so good, this, maybe!) and hop into cars again. And even if we can do only a few of these things it won't be so bad, will it? Above all, we shall try to get into touch with old friends. Some — alas! — won't be there. We shall know some heartaches over that, I have no doubt; but how grand it will be to meet

the others! Perhaps, most important of all, it will be a kinder, more understanding world; a less greedy and selfimportant and self-centred place. How can it be otherwise?

So-once more-here's hoping.



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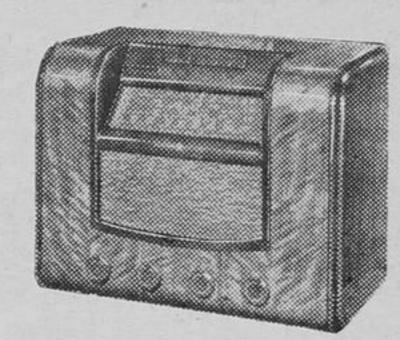
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