

Most of us are so busy that we have no time for thought; my only quiet moments are when I am driving the car. The other day when coming home from work I stopped for a moment on Newlands Corner and looked away over the changing green of the Tillingbourne Valley to the distant fir woods of Leith Hill which stood blue against the sky in the evening light. It struck me then how unexpectedly tranquil is our mode of living. The trivial restrictions and deprivations imposed on us by the war have already become so part of our daily life that they are no longer irksome. It is as natural to carry an Identity Card as to have a clean handkerchief; a gas mask is an indispensable part of our travelling wardrobe; and the nightly locking and dismembering of one's own cars have become practically automatic. The evacuee children are now a much loved part of the family circle and it is no longer a sacrifice but the most natural thing in the world to give up the before-dinner bath and glass of sherry for the sake of telling their children a bedtime story. Since the latest rationing orders have come in we have learnt, when out to tea, to refuse butter and sugar, though at home whether by persuasion of the Government or by careful housekeeping the rationing of food is not apparent.

We are no longer surprised at the change that has stolen over the country. How odd to think that last September I felt slightly self-conscious at dining in a restaurant with a man in uniform. Now the uniform habit has become so universal that even my own is no longer an embarrassment. What storms of protest were raised in the days of peace against the proposal to make a new road in the Tillingbourne Valley, but now how welcome are the anti-tank defences which sprawl like arterial roads



Armoured car in Albury, 1940 (*Imperial War Museum*)

below the hillcrest scarring the smooth green of the Downs with white. The woods, once so carefully preserved against trespassers, are now moving with troops. Sometimes one's favourite walk is closed mysteriously for a few days, and when it is re-opened a sentry steps from beneath the cover of the trees to ask for one's Identity Card. Then one becomes aware of the squat form of a gun leering through the deep undergrowth and a line of camouflaged tanks concealed in the dappled shadows. There is a new sound in the woods; from all directions come the ring of mortar knives on brick-work as the pill boxes and machine-gun posts are hurriedly constructed.

The road blocks are increasing in number and efficiency. The early Heath Robinson affairs⁷¹ – consisting mainly of a tangle of barbed wire attached to a garden roller or a battered tin bath – are now generally replaced by substantial piles of tree trunks. The strategic points of vantage are guarded by massive cones or blocks of concrete which half closed the roads. In places where the local authorities are most astute, the carriage way is painted in camouflage colours and strands of wire [are] suspended like bridges over the road, preventing the landing of aeroplanes. The traffic on the roads has become a menace. Army lorries, motor bicycles, tanks, camouflage buses and convoys of mechanised vehicles thunder down the narrow country lanes. The drivers are courteous to civilian motor traffic but the chief characteristic of the army is the speed.

I suppose every village boasts that its Local Defence Volunteers [*i.e.*, the *Home Guard*] are the most enthusiastic in the country, and ours is no exception to the rule. In the early days their enthusiasm outstripped their technical skill and their first achievements included the shooting of one sentry by another, the wounding of a cow and the slaughter of a stag, while the first car to be held up at a road block contained a peer of the realm caught joy-riding with a dubious looking lady friend.

Now that the sign posts have gone we have all become expert map readers and we vie with each other in calling attention to any notice which may betray the identity of our homes. There have been controversies about the removal of a bus timetable from the Post Office and of the Mothers Union banner from the Church. Nothing is too small to escape our attention, for even in the churchyard the names of houses on the tombstones have been obliterated with putty. We have not yet grown accustomed to the absence of church bells, now only to be rung to give warning of the approach of airborne troops. I find there is something rather un-Sabbatical about the silent Sunday walk to church.

Our gardens show the mark of wartime. Some of the herbaceous borders have gone, and in the beds the gay colours of annuals have given place to the variegated red of beetroot leaves. Our frames have been temporarily removed and in their place a huge mound of untidy earth covers the roof of our air-raid shelter – the greenhouse stoke hole which has been enlarged and made safe with concrete. We have not used it yet. In the country we do not have a warning siren though every night the searchlights make patterns in the sky. Some of us who suffer from insomnia say they have heard firing or have had their beds shaken by the explosion of bombs; others describe gleefully the blood curdling sounds of the distant Guildford siren. But in Albury the normal, healthy person can sleep from 11 to 7 without fear of interruption. In spite

⁷¹ The cartoonist and illustrator, Heath Robinson (1872–1944), was noted for his drawings of absurdly complicated contraptions.