

## THE OPEN ROAD AGAIN

JAMES'S solitary horseman could walk his horse up to a signpost, and duly following the directions, come upon a village. The clang of hammer upon anvil would lead him to the forge, and the hanging sign of an inn would swing its invitation to him. Should he want squire or parson or cornchandler, there was the local inhabitant fearlessly walking his own village street to tell where they were to be found.

Perhaps it may be an idle and retrogressive sentiment that makes one regret the day when sign-board and signpost met the needs of commerce and transport. The motor and the general speeding up of life have changed all that, and it seems as if a stark ugliness is to be an unavoidable adjunct to life as it is rushed nowadays.

Giant hoardings, a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, tell the motorist always in a hurry, which way to turn for Folkestone. A recent journey from Maidstone to Canterbury revealed a roadside bespattered with pestering invitations to take tea first at this one's, and then at that one's Olde English Tea House, which monstrosity would put in its crazy appearance fifty, a hundred, or three hundred yards after the oriflammed advertisement. That stretch of road was cluttered up with the signs of people more than anxious to give us all our cup of tea. Whatever may be said of the beverage, the invitations did not inebriate, but then neither did they cheer.

This little journey led to a few days in Thanet. In holy Thanet the casual traveller, especially were he the untutored foreigner, might be led to suppose that all ways over some miles of country led to Margate's Dreamland, the obvious centre of right desire, if the ubiquity of advertised mileage to this Dreamland

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count for what is intended. This, in a gracious countryside stored with memory! An honest laudatory notice of Somebody's Beer posted up on the summit of Ben Nevis would be less of an abomination than this presumption that Dreamland should appeal to all on Thanet. Indeed it would be a nice point whether the hypothetical advertisement on Ben Nevis might not be accompanied by the reality, the thing itself, beer for the brave climber. But Dreamland——!

If we are to have advertisements, of course they must be conspicuous. There is no blinking that fact. Advertisements must advertise. They must be seen. When all the world is moving fast, our attention must be arrested without any slackening of pace. Big advertisements, therefore, and not tucked away either! On utilitarian grounds there is no challenging that.

To restrict the number of advertisements by hoarding and poster does not seem practicable. If you allow Smith, Brown, and Jones to advertise their precious commodities, there does not seem to be any fair reason for preventing Robinson from doing the same if he can pay the price. It seems that we must reconcile ourselves to the fact of advertisements having to advertise.

We may recoil from the spoliation of beauty resulting therefrom. Some may find practical grievance in the manner of advertisement. Others will say that as the thing itself is essentially vulgar, for the crowd, there is nothing to be gained by attempting to graft dignity and beauty, certainly not mere prettiness, on to a vulgar stock.

For instance, we do not want petrol-pump stations sheltered under a pagoda, or even under a pergola. To my mind, if there is to be a petrol-pump, let it be as dignified as the wretched thing finds it possible to be. Let it be an honest-to-goodness petrol-pump and leave it at that. Different motorists have preferences

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for different brands of petrol and oil. The pump station has to proclaim that it has certain brands. Here is the fact about it, and the printing of the names of these brands in Gothic lettering does not make the necessity less ugly.

However, to the sick sweet relief is in sight, I think. We are on the verge of passing out of the age of hoarding and poster. The advertisement of the future will have to attract the downward glance of the travelling public. A hoarding on the wall of an old castle will not be of much use as an advertisement to the man in an aeroplane. The advertisements of the future may have to be on a giant scale on the flat. Here and there a field or so boarded over might usefully bring a well-known furnishing firm to the notice of the flying public, and the wonderstruck face of Mr. Everyman may yet inspire the hesitating prospective bridegroom in the skies with new hope and a great courage. Architects and builders will be encouraged to see that public buildings and large houses have flat roofs which can be turned to profitable use for advertising purposes. Surely, too, the futuro-modern conception of Blatancy-cum-Rusticity will not be slow in showing itself. The by then super-efficient modern farmer will have learnt to advertise. From above a cornfield will be seen as an old gold background to *Hodge for Grain* picked out in closely-patterned synthetic poppies, each poppy fitted with an electric bulb for night effects. The very best cinemas will have reared above them sparkling captive balloons of Moorish design, vast improvements on the war-time 'sausage,' winking their cinematographic attractions into the desecrated night.

I have no doubt that Britain will control her own skies and that there will have to be a British Sky Sign Corporation. This B.S.S.C. will be an important branch of the then all-powerful B.B.C. Yes, we must and will have our All-Writing, All-Talking, All-Sing-

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ing, All-Signing, one hundred per cent. British Sky Sign Corporation (Telegraphic address: Caeloscript, London). And the 'Daily Expressionist' will certainly have a stupendous money prize competition, open to all its registered readers, for the most exact and the most convenient new word by which to call the process. The hybrid word hatcher will get to work. Someone will think of Etherograph, another of Airgramophone, another of Aeropict. Finally by the vote of the majority of its registered readers the 'Daily Expressionist' will decide on Etheropictophone, and the great British public will simply speak and write of it all as 'airadverts.'

When this comes to pass the upright hoardings will disappear, and we shall be able to walk again through the countryside and, if we keep our heads well down and wear sound neutralisers over our ears, we may again reasonably enjoy the beauty on the face of our England.

JOHN PREEDY.

POSTSCRIPTUM.—The day after this essay was submitted to BLACKFRIARS, the morning papers gave news that the authorities of Norwich had given instructions for an air sign post to be laid out on the ground, 278 feet in length. It is to take the form of an arrow pointing due north with the letter 'N' in the middle of the arrow, so that it can be distinguished at a height of 2,000 feet from any other sign. One newspaper went on to say that in the U.S.A. there are some 12,000 such air signs.—J.P.