

England, with all thy faults I love thee...

Our contributor, a young Wisbech man at present in the United States, lists some of the English habits and institutions which he particularly misses.

"BRITAIN Baiting" is a pastime frequently indulged in by English people who have spent some time in the U.S.A. It is very easy—and I confess I am one of the chief offenders—to sit back in the streamlined luxury of the United States, and think of Great Britain only in terms of poor service, lack of enterprise and inefficiency. True, these are faults which must be remedied, but for me they are trivialities compared to the real advantages which I think she has over other countries.

I have now been in America three months and I have spent much of this time being impressed; impressed by the speed at which things are done, impressed by the quality of the most inconsequential goods and by the warmth of American hospitality, which seems to have no bounds. I am now becoming impressed by the things I miss in England—things which I took for granted while I was there.

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I miss, for example, the English policeman, with his red face and black helmet, pumping up his bicycle tyre on a street corner. I do not know whether it is because they are not armed and are consequently less able to retaliate if they cause offence, or just because of a native geniality, but British police are uniformed angels compared with those over here. Generally these are surly and arrogant, and are more likely to tell you to go to hell than your direction. Some are different, but this is the exception rather than the rule.

I miss the tolerant laws which concern the necessities of life—such as drinking. In many States, the minimum age for drinking anywhere—even in your own home—is 21. Penalties are severe for violators. This is a far cry from that gem of British jurisdiction passed in 1933 which declared it an offence "for anyone to give intoxicating liquor to any child under the age of five, except in a case of medical necessity." Obviously the rules are broken; my room-mate at the university keeps

a "fifth" of whisky in one of the speakers of his stereo record player in case of emergencies, but this is an awful lot of trouble to have to go to, just for a drink.

Still on the same subject, I miss the English pub, with its moustached bartender, its low beams and its tired darts board... I also miss the English beer—beer that does not form icicles on your teeth everytime you drink it—and the spirit of joviality which it always engenders.

I miss my home town of Wisbech, with its pretty girls and fat ladies who try to push their children under your car on Saturday mornings. I miss the statue of Thomas Clarkson, and the bowler hat which he periodically wears; I even miss seeing Wisbech lose 3-2 to Weymouth, at home.

I miss Mr. Crown at the Elm post office and the rumour that he carries on as an elephant dealer out of business hours. I tried to increase the variety of his stock by sending him two Nebraska buffaloes, but the Post Office rejected them on the grounds that they exceeded the maximum size for an air mail parcel.

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Incredibly, I miss the winding English roads with their evident desire to meander amiably through sleepy villages, green fields and leafy woods, and to lead nowhere. I recently travelled 400 miles across the State by car. The roads were so straight that even though we never exceeded the 70 m.p.h. State speed limit, we still averaged over 60 miles an hour. It is a very satisfying feeling to be able to eat up all those miles, but it becomes monotonous after you embark upon your sixth hour of dead straight road.

I even miss the BBC, and its news bulletins which do not suffer a series of pops and pings and bongs everytime a new topic is introduced. I miss coherent radio documentaries which are not continuously interrupted by the latest price reductions at the local supermarket, or by the constant reminder that "KDIN is the swing-



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ingest radio station in the mid-west." In America, every reasonably sized town has one or more independent commercial radio stations. There is no equivalent of the Third Programme or even of the Home Service, because the greater part of all broadcasting time is taken in transmitting pop music.

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Lastly, I miss the English monetary system, with its nice simple way of dividing everything into units of twelve and twenty. My nostalgia for this is satisfied in part by the almost magical powers which are attributed to me as I unfurl its mysteries to bewildered Americans. Let us never change this institution. Its scope for deterring an aggressor extends far beyond those of a mere nuclear weapon.

I am not criticising America, nor am I homesick for Britain; America has too many exciting people to meet for me to feel more than the slightest twinge of that. This is a marvellous country. It is still young enough to give even the most unusual ideas and whims a chance to flourish, but old enough to cope intelligently with the problems of the modern world. Nevertheless England will always be my first choice. I find an irresistible attraction towards its great spirit, people and customs, all of which may be enhanced by the occasional touch of poor service, lack of enterprise and inefficiency.

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