

DOWN TO EARTH

BY ALAN DEVOE

On Salvaging Nature

IN the newspapers and magazines, these days, there is published a deal of matter concerning the vital importance of conservation. Some of the material is prepared and released by the Office of War Information; some of it is adapted therefrom by writers; a little of it is spontaneously written by individuals who have spe-

cial knowledge in the field and who feel it a duty to publicize conservation's urgency.

This spate of writing about conservation is all to the good. But most of it is primarily concerned either with the huge and clearly war-linked aspects of nature-conservation — petroleum resources, for example — or



Pine Marten

Frank Utpatel

with the day-to-day Home Front kinds of "conservation" which every citizen ought to practice: conserving of automobile tires, household fats, tin cans, bottle-tops, or whatever sort of rare and dwindling manufactured product. Every bit of this publicization is important and desirable; for the nonwastage of national petroleum resources *is* a necessity of the utmost gravity; and the little frittering away of rubber that occurs whenever a citizen goes motoring unnecessarily *can* mount up, if enough citizens are careless in this way, to something like a national catastrophe.

But there is another kind of conservation, the need of which is not publicized as these are, for it is not clearly war-linked. It is the conservation, simply, of the American outdoors: of the birds and mammals and fish and forests and rushing streams and all the other things that make up the American wild scene. It is the preservation of ivory-billed woodpeckers, the adequate protection of wild ducks, the ensurance that no towering pine shall be carelessly or greedily felled for timber when other sources are available.

Conservation in this sense is considerably preached, and even considerably practised, by Americans in times of peace. But now in a day of desperate war — war which must be prosecuted "totally" — there easily comes forgetfulness. There comes the mood: "After all, everything should be subordinated to the waging of the war shouldn't it?" From such a mood

of fighting patriotism, in itself admirable, it is unhappily a very short step to easing up on the restrictions against water-pollution by the dyes or other chemicals from factories. It is a very short step to slashing down certain virgin Californian forests, without pausing to ponder very critically whether the needed lumber may not be procurable without despoiling a wilderness so ancient, so solemnly lovely, so haunted with the Eden-dream. It is no step at all to get to thinking: "What difference does it make, in a time like this, in a war to the death, whether some rivers and streams get polluted and some fish get killed? We want timber, and we want it fast, and lots of it, and we can't stop to sentimentalize about spoiling a forest. Let the ducks take care of themselves as best they can. We're busy taking care of Japanese and Germans. If the ivory-billed woodpecker is in danger of becoming extinct . . . well, let it become extinct. The thing we are concentrating on is the extinction of the Axis."

It is understandably easy for this mood to occur. Indeed, it is nearly inevitable that it should. In a time of passionately hot devotion to the total prosecution of a total war, there does perhaps seem something a little absurd, a little trivial-minded, in stopping to worry about the fate of the woodland caribou, or the gigantic condor that is vanishing from the west, or the menaced California forests where grow trees that were towering ancients in the day of Jesus of Naz-

areth. These issues may not seem very substantial things with which to concern ourselves, in a time when (as this is written) we have no more than a foothold on the soil of France, and are moving from Pacific island to Pacific island, against the Japanese, with a necessarily fearful slowness and a ghastly toll of lives.

But it is a short view, a war-excited view, to brush aside as trivial the conservation of any aspect of the American outdoors. The conservation of petroleum is clearly and evidently linked to the war. But so, more subtly but none the less surely, is the conservation of trout, trees, meadows, mountains, and every whooping crane and roseate spoonbill. There are two reasons why. The first is simply practical and statistical. The second, so to put it, is a matter of the human spirit and the human heart.

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The first argument runs drearily enough, in more senses than one. It is to be stated simply by citing what has happened, historically, to the American outdoors whenever we have been thoughtless or careless, or over-avid for quick gain. It is to be stated by references, perhaps, to the Dust Bowl; or perhaps references to such fabulous facts as that, through glut-tonous forestry and overgrazing and erosion, some three hundred million acres of this land have been brought to ruin; or possibly by reference to the terrible statistics that tell how

over a hundred million acres of our sometime woodland have been subjected, in this or that rush of exploitation, to such violent and unthinking assault that nothing now, unless planned and systematic replanting, can ever make them productive again. All these citations make tedious reading; and they have been pointed to before. It is not necessary to detail everything here again. It is enough to ask: Where are the martens that once lived in the eastern woods from Labrador to Virginia? What of the mountain lion and the bighorn sheep, the sea otters, the pinnated grouse and the trumpeter swans? It is enough to answer: They are gone now, or going.

There are practical statistics — row on row of volumes of them — to say what losses like these have meant to us in dollars and cents. A good forest has a worth computable to the decimal. The fur-bearing mammals have a value expressible in as strictly economic terms as the value of diamonds. The asset of our wild birds has been worked out by patient ecologists to sets of figures that would convince an actuary.

But though all this is true, and though a woodland or a pasture or a bird or a wild animal can be translated into banker's language to persuade the ledger-minded, that is perhaps not the most important reason why, in the middle of a war, we should be scrupulous in our preservation of the American outdoors. The second reason is a better one: the one

that has to do with quite another kind of values.

The American man, unless there is something wrong with him, is a devoted outdoorsman. He has always been. Fishing, hunting, camping, enjoying in whatever way the forests and streams and fauna of his land: these have always been a profound delight to him. All men everywhere, of course, have a responsiveness, in the depths of their being, to the outdoors and the wild; for all of us, whether we sit in a skyscraper office or a city apartment, are still animals, and the smell of Spring earth or the bark of a fox can stir us as penned geese are stirred when they hear the migrating honkers pass overhead on rushing wings in their wild, sweet freedom. But Americans have the feeling of nature-closeness particularly. We have it because only yesterday we were frontiersmen in a wilderness. We have it because the Indian deeply tintured our culture with his forest-culture, only yesterday. The men of America love animal-lore and woods-lore; they love to swap yarns about it. Though we are not, as a people, notably religious in any formal churchly sense, our kinship with the outdoors has given us a rooted feeling — ill-articulated, dim, but not to be destroyed by any wind of doctrine — of the Great Spirit, the Great Mystery, that pervades the twilight hemlock-forest and instructs the fox. We have

been given strength, perhaps more than we know, by this earthly-mystical point of view that is a deep-sunk taproot in the American soil.

A great part of a whole generation of young American manhood is now overseas, in battle. They will want, and will wholeheartedly deserve, many things when they come home again. They will want work, a decent social order, a recognition of what they have been through. They will also want — nor is it only a guess to say so — an outdoors at least as clean and flourishing as when they left. They will want to get back to the American earth: to take the old fishing gear from the closet and dust it off and set out for some shaded, swirling pool where the trout are. They will want, most urgently, to take up the gun of peacetime instead of the gun of war. They will want, in their weariness and for the cure of the wounds of the spirit, just to enter the healing place that is a forest, and stand in silence and aloneness there, and be renewed.

It is no guess. It is a message that soldiers of all kinds and ranks have sent to the present writer. A fighting man does not necessarily devote his dreams to pin-up girls. He has a better dream: the dream of his outdoors at home. The preservation of that outdoors has been botched and violated often enough in the past. This time, we might remind ourselves, we hold the outdoors as a trust.



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Laski's Wave of the Future

BY WILLIAM HENRY CHAMBERLIN

NOTHING fails like defeat. So at the present stage of the war there would seem to be little danger that anyone would regard Hitler's national socialism or the deflated Italian fascism as a predestined inevitability, as a wave of the future.

But the war that promises to eliminate these two forms of the totalitarian state has not rid the world of the totalitarian idea and practice. For the Soviet Union remains, stronger than ever and unregenerate in its adherence to the superstate as a principle and as a way of life. It is prospectively one of the victorious Big Three and indicates a clear intention to collect rather more than its share of the spoils of victory.

For people enamored of limitless organized force, yearning to immerse themselves in some wave of the future, Stalin's régime therefore offers the only great temptation that still remains. It is a temptation to which the most diverse kinds of people are yielding with mystical abandon — intellectuals tired of thinking, American industrialists with a yen for economic suicide, politicians who worship power and success *per se*, simple souls

seeking some shortcut to "security."

The illogic of their assumptions has now found brilliant rhetorical expression in a book pretentiously titled *Faith, Reason and Civilization*,¹ by the British left winger, Harold J. Laski. Despite the title, it not merely eschews reason but glories in defying it. I know of nothing written by prophets of the fascist or Nazi religions more disdainful of facts, more self-righteous in its obscurantism than this volume. Where earlier literary justifications of the Soviet variant of totalitarianism, such as the books of the Webbs and the mixed-up Dean of Canterbury, misrepresented the Russian facts, Dr. Laski ignores them. His method is that of name-calling — elegantly phrased, but name-calling all the same: "honorific catchwords to describe nearly everything connected with Russian communism and invidious catchwords to describe democratic capitalism," as Henry Hazlitt puts it in the *New York Times*.

To call the Soviet régime totalitarian is not a matter of argument or polemics. It is a mere statement of political scientific fact. Totalitarian-

¹ \$2.50. Viking.