

Going, going, gone. . . . The rooster goes to the man in the pea-green suit for \$1200." But it is understood that an old tractor will be thrown in. It's the auctioneer's way of beating the OPA price ceiling

THIS is about farmers and their relation to the war. Farmers are unorganized and inarticulate. They have no National Manufacturers Association or U. S. Chamber of Commerce to speak for them. They are essentially 13,000,000 individual tenants, renters and independent proprietors, scattered all over the country, with a wide range of activities and special interests.

The farm lobby represents a comparatively few rich farmers and commodity dealers. The Farmers' Union represents a few tenant farmers, small operators, sharecroppers—the poor ones. But most middle-of-the-road farmers have no representation at all except through their congressmen. They have been victims of economic and political exploitation. They are accused of many things of which they are innocent. The average city dweller knows so little about the farming industry that he cannot judge the farmers' situation or the vast contribution they make toward winning the war.

I am a commercial farmer and credited with being articulate. Every morning I am confronted with the same problems as every other farmer in America. I know that politics are inextricably woven into food production.

The food crisis is not finished. We have not even seen the worst of it. That will come in December, January and February because whatever has been done under pressure of public indignation and fury has been both too little and too late. Food Administrator Chester Davis is able, honest and experienced, but he will be helpless unless he gets the necessary power and co-operation from the President. Whether he will be given power and co-operation, or be blocked by the maneuvering of the coming Presidential election, no one knows.

Situation Badly Muddled

Knowing Mr. Davis, I feel he would not allow himself to be drafted to handle one of the most colossal messes in our history unless he had power to do the job. If he does not possess this power to correct the incredibly muddled food situation—if he is blocked by politicians and incompetents—then we are in for a bad time. Not only will we be limited to a diet like that of Germany, but we actually will not have enough to eat.

We will be forced to make the bitterest of choices: To go below a healthful standard of eating and send what we can to our allies and liberated friends, or demand a sound but limited diet and let the rest of the world go without.

Last year was the most favorable crop season in twenty-five years, and still we did not have enough food for ourselves, our Armed Forces and our allies. The 1943 season has begun badly. The vital wheat crop has been badly winter-damaged; many Middle Western farmers are plowing up wheat to replace it with some other crop. Spring was late in the bread-basket area; corn may not ripen—and corn is the food for hogs and beef cattle, the backbone of our meat diet.

There is an increase in hog production, in numbers, but if there is a shortage of feed, both hogs and cattle will be dumped on the market in early fall, and for the rest of the year there will be a meat shortage that will make the present situation seem like abundance. If there is a serious drought, which seems likely, not only will Western corn burn out, but cattle and hogs will die even before they reach the corn-feeding stage, from want of pasture and water.

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BY LOUIS BROMFIELD

PHOTOGRAPH FOR COLLIER'S BY WILLIAM RITTER

Bureaucracy threatens to create famine in America unless we give our food producers the men and machinery they need



FARMER'S WAR, TOO

TALENT FOR DESTRUCTION

By Harry Sylvester

ILLUSTRATED BY PERCY LEASON

The story of one man's wanton power, suddenly channeled into a purpose not to be denied

IN THE late afternoon light of the mountains, the American, Edward Martingale, walked down one of the cobbled paths that in the Mexican village of Taxco lead from one terrace to the next. In the world of our times, this town is the last stronghold of what used to be called Bohemianism, because the war has done strange things to what used to be the

other strongholds. So that you know a little about Edward Martingale when you know that he was there—a lean, hard-drinking man in his thirties—when he should have been in his own country.

He wore a wide hat, the heavily decorated leather jacket of a Mexican *charro*, expensive whipcord trousers and high-heeled shoes or boots that had cost thirty-five dollars in Denver two years before. A silk scarf was tied closely around his neck and was knotted to one side in the way American cowboys are supposed to wear it when they come to town. Between tobacco-stained fingers he carried a hand-rolled cigarette and under his jacket he

wore a shoulder holster which was empty.

Shadow barred the light as he walked, and passing through the shadow was like entering water. Below him, in front of the high, double towers of the cathedral, the Plaza lay in deeper shade, and the light where it struck the bell towers and the branches of the trees was red-gold. Entering the Plaza was like going into a pool of water, and there were, under its trees, only a few bootblacks and squat *pistoleros*. From shade Martingale turned into the sun of one of the side streets, feeling the warmth enter suddenly into him. He supposed it was characteristic of his whole life, seeking sun and warmth and ease regardless

of the consequences, especially regardless of the consequences to other people.

For he had not been going to enter that street today. Down it a hundred yards or so he could see the house he had not been going to enter today and in front of it the car with the Illinois license. He remembered, suddenly, the girl he had been married to in the village near Warrenton and the terrible whiteness of her face that time he had brought back with him and into the house, the people from the show that was being tried out in Baltimore. The two men, the three girls—one of the girls obviously with himself.

In front of the house, Martingale hesitated. He could wonder why he should come here now. He knew Ella Havengen's husband was coming down from the States on a visit, and now the car told him the man was in the house. He himself should not be here, Martingale told himself, and knocked on the door that led into the patio around which the house was built. A houseboy, his face wooden and expressionless, let him in. Shadow was deep in the patio, too, although sun still touched the upper walls and reflected a diffused light on the bright green of the grass and the sharp colors of the garden furniture. The man seated there looked curiously at Martingale, but the woman, much younger than the man, was pale under her tan and did not smile, even in greeting. She rose and said: "This is Mr. Martingale, dear; he's a friend of the Halletts."

"Oh, yes," the man said, rising. "I feel I know the Halletts. Ella has mentioned them so often in her letters."

"I'M GLAD to see you," Martingale said. He saw that the man's face masked uneasiness, that he felt unduly the difference in their ages. Martingale sat down easily and saw Ella get control of herself. She said: "What will you have to drink, tequila limeade?"

"It's cooling off," Martingale said. "I think I'll have tequila straight."

"I thought that stuff was poison, straight," Mr. Havengen said. "At least so they tell me."

"Oh, you get used to it," Martingale told him.

"You've been here some time, then?" Havengen said.

"Since before the war."

"It's certainly a nice place," Havengen said, with false ease. "First time I been down. I've been busy running back and forth between Chicago and Washington."

"I guess it's pretty hectic in the States," Martingale said. "Those of us that were down here in Mexico before the war, the U. S. wants to stay. Preserving international relationships and so on." The words were glib on his tongue by now. He saw, in sudden memory, one of the things he liked down here: the doves coming down from the mountains at sunset, passing along the flyways in singles and pairs, the sharp-winged birds dropping before the sound of his twenty-gauge. He wondered why he thought of them now; he saw that it was the quality of the light: this was the time of day the fighting of the doves down from the mountains began.

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The Indian stopped and said, "Those of the boots began to hurry when they heard the shot." "Perhaps," said Martingale, "we should look into those of the boots"

