

phere of a fair with something, too, of a small country show. On a wet day, like the first day of this year's sale, the whole affair becomes bedraggled, and if the day is hot as well as wet the discomfort reaches its peak. The hills which rise up on both sides of the Trentham racecourse seem to compress the small wet valley into an oven, the noise becomes irritating, the auctioneer seems to be fighting the weather and the buyers as well, and there is no humour and little fun. The tarpaulins over the stands leak here and there, and underneath, the packed spectators squirm in sticky discomfort. There is one note of colour. An elderly patron, immaculately clad to the point of foppishness, is wandering around the ring carefully protecting himself against the rain with a bright red and yellow beach parasol.

The only refuge seems to be the bar, which is very small, very crowded, and only moderately convivial. In the corner stand three casks with, on top of them, a crate of soft drinks, and with these cluttered adjuncts of drinking it is almost impossible to move. Outside it rains harder and harder, and through the rain comes the insistent, tireless voice of the auctioneer. Sometimes, when the bidding is slow, his staccato trumpeting becomes like a needle stuck in a gramophone record:

"130 I am offered, 130, 130, 130, any advance on 130, any advance, any advance, 130 it is, 130 it is. Can't dwell. Going to sell." At last, with a sigh of relief, "Sold!" Then it starts all over again. Still, it's a human little cubby hole, the bar. And so useful—on a fine day a refuge from the heat, on a wet day a refuge from the rain, always a refuge from something.

The last lot sold, the captains and the kings of the racing world depart in the large and shining motor-cars which grace the entrance to the stables, and the humbler patrons by train and bus. The scene now is a bit empty and depressing. All that is left are a few recollections already dim and faint, a few mental snapshots—the wistful comment of a breeder who had sold a colt for 1,500 guineas, "I'd like to have raced him myself," the bonus of £50 that went to the colt's stable boy, the hard-luck racing tales of the less-prosperous veterans who travelled by train, the murmured reflections of a tired soul worrying about the next race meeting: "So and so ought to pay a hatful if he wins. Bill might give me the tip if I can find him"; the irritated comment of a disappointed breeder: "We might get decent prices if we could get rid of these blasted Foxbridges"; and the fact that the beer was free.

