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THE BUDDING MORROW

also by Adrian Bell

CORDUROY

SILVER LEY

THE CHERRY TREE

FOLLY FIELD

THE BALCONY

BY-ROAD

THE SHEPHERD'S FARM

APPLE ACRE

SUNRISE TO SUNSET

THE ADRIAN BELL OMNIBUS

[Corduroy—Silver Ley—The Cherry Tree]

The Budding Morrow

ADRIAN BELL



John Lane The Bodley Head
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The Three-Legged Stool

SIX o'clock 'summer-time' on a January morning: it might be midnight. The sky is black between the stars: all the constellations glitter. Sirius is like a lesser moon hovering over the farmhouse of my neighbour in a little haze of its own light. The Milky Way is over my cowshed (would it were a portent), and there is a dim red spark of a star low on my right.

I have just had breakfast—or pre-breakfast—in the cosy kitchen, with its modern, efficient and beautiful stove. While I fed, I planned my farming day. But now, outside, how small I feel under the massed lights of the firmament; how earthy my preoccupations. Even so, is there an ounce of humus in all that galaxy, I wonder? Can the universe grow a kernel of wheat? No answer is forthcoming, save from the dim red star on my right, which gives me 'good morning' as it swings past. It is the cigarette-point of another milker, cycling lampless to work, saluting my own cigarette-point.

I stamp my cigarette out on the road, where I had come to finish it. I allow no lighted cigarette in the precincts of the farmyard. And so, out of the night into the warm yellow glim of the milking shed, where stand the backsides of my ten cows in a row, their heads being lost in the shadows and the mangers.

The first stall is empty; or rather it would be, if it were possible for any space in a farmyard to be empty. Actually it contains the builder's wheelbarrow and sundry tools, which

have no business in a modern cowshed at all, but they are an earnest of his returning to finish a job. Neither, of course, has the hen's nest in the empty manger: but do you think I can keep that hen out?

Strawberry would eat the hen's egg if she could get at it; but her neck chain is not quite long enough. On occasion, when it is an extra large egg, or she is feeling particularly hungry, she twists and strains and turns, until she has pushed her head through the tubular framework in a place where it should not be able to squeeze through, and her chain is somehow wound round another bar of it; so that by the time I have removed the egg of temptation, she is suffocating in an attitude of gazing upside down at her own udder.

Then in comes Walter. I never know whether to welcome or resent his appearance at these crises. Another minute, and I could have freed her and never divulged that anything had been amiss. But in he comes, and I must have it all again—Strawberry being put to rights—about how his father would not have a chain on a cow but only a halter, because, he said, you can cut a halter, if a cow gets into a muddle, but you can't cut a chain. As between halter and chain, Walter and I will never agree; because I remember the truly awful twice-daily struggle of getting halters over the heads of cows who were intent only on trying to guzzle as much of the contents of the long old-fashioned manger, in our then old-fashioned cowshed, as they could before the others.

By tradition, cows are called after flowers or fruit, except pedigree ones, whose names are utterly nonsensical. Next to Strawberry stands Buttercup, who was a heifer last winter, spelt by the girl on the milk-record sheet (we were late in naming her) Kepher. 'My dear girl,' I said, 'that's not how you spell it: it's—give me the pencil—HEI . . . I mean HIE . . . no, what did I say?' I called across to the house; 'Nora, how do you spell heifer?'

'HEI . , .' Nora began, in the act of rolling out pastry.

'Not HIE?'

'No—oh, I don't know. Now you've muddled me up.'

We thereupon christened her Buttercup.

It is warm in the cowshed; and if there is a more comfortable sound on a winter's morning than that often cows crunching a mixture of kale, chaff and oats, I have not heard it—unless it is that of horses feeding after a day at plough. It is a warm sound, mingled with the jingle of chains, and the occasional clank of our pails. It is warm against the cow's flank: milking lets you into the cold day's work gently. I like it; and the quiet, lamplit, rustling, munching row of bodies, and the sheer white walls and ceiling with the original cross-beams of the old shed adding a traditional touch to the cloistral bareness. It is one's morning orison to order, cleanliness, seemliness.

As I sit milking, I consider the day's work. Work on a farm is not just a thing you do; it is something that you are: it is a part of yourself. And altogether it is good. It has its triumphs and disasters, this wrestling with matter; but there is no time to brood over the latter, any more than to cherish unduly the former. The constant pressure, like a strong wind at your back, impels you on. Summers pass too quickly for all of us; but in farming the winter passes too quickly also.

There is no doubt milking is a tie. And who, in the piping times of peace and plenty(?) is going to be tied? 'How you gonna keep 'em down on the farm?' What words of prophecy we fox-trotted to in 1919. And in 194—? just how *are* you gonna? And yet this rut is, I feel, suited to the likes of me; the family man, the middle-ageing, who fancies that something accumulates in him by the reiterated ceremonial of seven-days-a-week. Is it wisdom—or merely the sanctuary of monotony?

Anyhow, wisdom there is to be had in farming, I do know

that. By its practical-sentient approach you can assess other trades, professions, assertions, researches, politics and passions. By the lodestone of the severe bodily and mental discipline of farming with your own (inadequate) muscle, eye and brain, you can achieve a just estimate of many a question of the hour—the decay of faith, machinery versus humanity, science versus religion. I do not know quite how this is so; but in the light of agricultural experience you can read the Gospels, St. Paul, History, Philosophy, Poetry anew. Above all, tutored by frost on the fingers, by the hand grown numb cutting kale for this warm feast of cows, by the vision of the seed also, the goodly seed that dies into life, one comes to appreciate that Christ spoke hard fact, literal to daily living in all times. One comes to resent the self-imposed task of public moralists to 'interpret' that teaching in the light of modern conditions, making it an excuse for condoning a number of things which we know to be not in the true and kindly grain of living; to whip up antagonisms in Tom, Dick and Harry which they do not naturally feel, by identifying other people, whole nations, with abstractions, and calling them collectively the Evil Thing, the Power of Darkness, and so forth. This sounds all right in a radio sermon; but after you have been all die week wrestling with the problems of the earth, you realise that it won't do. The Power of Darkness is not so obligingly metaphorical at six a.m. in January, but is a feet that hits you hard between the eyes when you grope for the shovel in the turnip shed and collide with the handle of the chaff-cutter.

It is quickest to fetch the lantern after all, the stable lantern that Walter has blacked-out by dressing it in an old felt hat with a hole in the crown. I remember Walter years ago in that old hat, a sort of black tragedian's hat, in which he used to come to feed the horses on Sundays, before ringing the bell for church, he being then sexton. Now I see in the hatted lantern

a sort of beatified Walter, his golden ghost confounding, even in a wavering and limited way, the Power of Darkness.

See how he—it—shines upon the load of kale tipped down on the floor there. The growing green looks startlingly vernal and vital in the shadowy place, with yesterday's melted sleet-drops glittering on the leaves.

For a week Walter has been laid up with 'flu. Halfway through the week I am visited by two leading local formers: they come to inspect my herd for the War Agricultural Committee. We discuss: they advise, and I profit by their opinions on various questions that arise in the course of my solitary meditations among my cows. Fresh eyes scan my stock and give me a fresh view of them. One last question; 'Do you,'—I address them both—'favour feeding roots and kale chopped or whole?' 'Whole.' 'Chopped,' answer one and the other both together. Then they look at each other and smile, and argue for and against all the way through the yard to their car, and for all I know to the next farm on their visit.

So I am where I was. No, for a remark of the elder farmer's, 'It looks to me a slovenly way of feeding cows indoors,' bit into me somewhere under my reason. No more in my cowshed shall there be kale plants whirling about like Indian clubs, and turnips and mangolds bouncing around like ping-pong balls, I will sweat, rather, at the wheel. There is the rub, you see. I have sweated at the handle of chaff-cutter and root-pulper, till after an hour I have at my feet something that looks like a gargantuan salad, a heap of juicy green and white and red slices; and the scent that exudes from all that liberated sap is something to make you hungry, as sea-air will do. But while I have been turning that handle, I have been hearing in the mind's ear the remark of a neighbour, 'they've got their own grinders,' and thinking, am I a fool to be doing this? I pause and a winter robin on the bullace tree by the open door chuckles—'yes.'

'In half an hour before breakfast/ Walter says, 'my father and I used to cut enough hay and straw chaff to last our horse and cattle for the day.' Walter's father was a small-holder, and one day, I feel, Walter will 'retire' to help his elder son when he comes home from the army to embark on a similar career.

Walter is about again, pale and a little tottery, a Sundayish figure. He has gravitated naturally from his cottage to the farm, though he is not really fit for any work yet. But he soon begins bundling kale into the chaff-cutter while I turn the wheel. And now, of course, there is no pause, no respite; while he keeps pushing it in, I must go on turning. The heap of chopped kale grows: the unchopped decreases. I see now how it was they cut so much in half an hour, with their indefatigable old-fashioned human machinery. All fodder on that old-fashioned holding was sliced, shredded, chaffed—even hay.

He has me breathless now at the wheel (it ill behoves the master to stop), and it is an opportunity he is not slow to take, to read me a favourite lesson. 'It does animals more good,' he says; 'it goes further; they don't waste any; it fills them better, cut up and mixed.' For he has observed that I have been feeding the kale whole, and the roots whole, or his wife has told him, for she came into the cowshed with a message the other day, just when I was at it. 'They hurl it about so,' Walter says. Yes, they were 'hurling it about'—one kale stalk very nearly hit her, 'and when it's scattered in the meadow they stamp half of it into the 'dut'.' My father used to say, 'I don't grow kale to have it stamped into the 'dut'.' Walter likes that emphatic full-stop of a word 'dut'; he seems to gain strength by it. I have no more breath, but the wheel revolves; there is little left of the heap; we will cut up the whole of it now: I'll show him that it isn't the sweat I grudge. Five minutes more. It is done; and my back, I believe, is done for.

But this is nothing to the labour of cutting hay and straw by hand. 'That's an early morning warmer,' says Walter.

Say that I acquired a little 11/2 h.p. oil-engine to drive the chaff-cutter—that *would* be sense. Then the robin on the bullace-tree *could* sing—and so could I.

The geese, thank heaven, have ceased to sing: there is something particularly irritating about their honk and cackle when you are engaged (usually against time) in some routine job. There they would be, their long necks stretched out, prodding into the stacks, into the root clamp, into the winter wheat. They were a war-time innovation. Green geese—'they only eat grass'. Only! The most important crop on the farm. The geese were good to eat, but I grudged them every blade of spring grass they ate, and every time I had to rush from some urgent job and shoo them away from a stack or young corn, and be insulted by them for it, I hated them more. Walter, ingrained commoner, rather liked them, the apparent economy of them 'picking up a living'. 'It's grubs they're eating,' he said, when they were manifestly clipping off the blades of my field of Yeoman wheat at £3 a sack for the seed. One day before Christmas all their necks were wrung, and a blessed hush fell upon the farmyard: order reigned again. One particularly spiteful old cock joined them in the mortuary, and later, after careful cooking, on the dish. Of that cock, from whom he had suffered much, Martin said, 'He can't undead himself now,' and prepared to enjoy his dinner.

Those geese might have had a foretaste of their end had they been endowed with understanding of the game that was played over them by the children. 'Here comes a chopper to chop off your head.' The geese being thoroughly tame, their long necks and single file formation made them ideal partners in Oranges and Lemons, which the three children could not very well play by themselves. I think they rather regret the passing of the geese for that, particularly as they enjoy all the game except being victims. They are chanting it in the barn now. Anthea says, 'You won't be afraid of the chip-chop part when it comes,

will you, Sylvia?' I apply my eye to a knot-hole in the boarding and see little Sylvia going round and round under the bridge of Martin's and Anthea's joined hands. The two chant the well-known verses, and the less well-known. They insist on going through every verse of the game, I shouldn't think there is a single City church left out; while Sylvia patiently runs round and round under their arms like a mouse, without even the hope that, when at last it comes to the 'chip-chop' part, she may escape 'beheading'. Martin, when it comes to his turn, has to pause for breath half way through, but still they will not omit a single line. Sylvia says thoughtfully, 'Three isn't really enough people. I know, let's make the pussies play.' But the barn cats are too playful: every draughty straw distracts them. The children bring their dolls to try: but one child leading dolls and the others chip-chopping over them ends in a tangle of arms. 'Really it needs a party,' Anthea says wistfully.

Kitty, Prince and Boxer

JCARLY morning frost, then thickening mist, darkness, culminating in downpour. I sent Poppy's bull calf to market, but with compunction, seeing the pretty, trustful, plump creature resting in a corner of the loose-box while his mother munched hay. It was so cosy in there, so wet and raw outside, that I felt a brute to be sending him off with no thought but that of 'business', to go through all the hurly-burly of the market. Yet I knew it would be foolish to keep him, seeing that every pint of milk is needed for human consumption. For a moment, while I was loading the calf into the cart, I lived his bewilderment and distress through this day—then turned away to the many jobs awaiting me on the farm; littered the yards,

fetched soaked kale, covered the root clamp with cavings: cleaned out the cowshed.

I took the afternoon off, and cycled slowly in the sunshine which had followed the storm, to see a friend who also keeps cows, and to talk about them.

In my friend's opinion there is no doubt that the constitution of stock in the country is declining owing to milk-forcing. This whole problem of milk-selling is a serious one—how to dovetail it into a thorough, soil-enriching husbandry? I thought about it cycling home in moonlight under a sky quilted with clouds, with no sound but the swish of my tyres. Afternoon had blessed the fields and farms with sunlight, making all look colourful, homely and orderly—England herself. Even a new barn all of tin beside an old farm looked clean and seemly. A church wis sweet as an old rhyme, with its facets of flint and diamond-paned glass glinting in the sun: its round tower on the hill, and beside it the rectory, with pink-washed walls and graceful windows. It reminded me of the seventeenth-century parson poets and saints—Herbert, Vaughan and kindred country spirits. The humble-rich little church: the new tin barn: can they ever, by any stretch, join hands? The spirit of place, if deeply realised, might fuse them.

Walter is in the stable, where I join him after I have mixed the kale, as much as to say, 'You see, I've looked after thera.'

'Kitty, she'd be, as you might say, aunt to Prince,' Walter says, slowly smoothing a hand down her haunches. This mental excursion of his convalescence has takfen some working out: I was just beginning to wonder at his silence. I suppose horses can have aunts: anyhow, 'aunt' suits Kitty: I cannot think how better to describe her. Yes, an aunt of a horse. Too long in the leg and stiff in the leg, does odd-jobs, seems to have been born in cart-harness: left standing, will go no farther than the hay-stack. Is used to second-best: wears the least-good collar, and

the older harness; sometimes a bridle that is mended with string. But that I count to myself a disgrace. I apologise to her if I have to do her bridle up with string. She tolerates Prince if he will mouth her back where it itches, and will do the same for him, but is snappy with him if he pokes his nose too far along the manger in her direction.

The stable is always a dark place. I want to put a window in it. A wall-ladder leads upward through a hole in the boards to a loft. This last week I have come to the conclusion that Walter must be a sort of monkey, because I find one rung missing at the top, and the one next to it has come away on one side from the wall, so that it is even more dangerous than if it were not there. How he has made that last leap from where the rungs fail to the floor of the loft several times a day I do not know. Suppleness is not a quality of which his figure is expressive. 'I shall find you dead on your back on the floor one of these days,' I say, dangling myself down.

'That's use,' he says. His hand is still going through that meditative motion along the horse's back—it is Boxer's back now: the hand now holds a brush.

'That horse,' I say, involuntarily on the defensive, 'always will go and lie down in the muck.' I know that Walter knows that I do not think so much of Boxer as of the other two. So, instinctively, he takes his part. Walter's is a much more estimable character, if you consider it, than mine. I simply love a horse or a cow for its physical perfection or output. It was dark this morning when I brushed Boxer, and I see now what the hatted and glimmering lantern did not show, some flecks of mud still on his coat. Walter is soon undisguisedly grooming him again.

Even on a small farm like mine, there are buildings, fields also, too little visited. I think that on every good farm there must be a fusser: the boss—or maybe the boss's wife. It means having a nagging eye for detail; a suspicious eye, that glances into

stable, cowshed or barn in the mood of 'what's wrong here?' It tends, I know, to make mountains out of molehills; but in so doing it prevents molehills accumulating into mountains. That is why the master is a bit of a nuisance about the place, and he feels how the farm settles down with a sigh of relief on the afternoon that he takes himself off to market, free at last of his presence. The straw that falls off the fork blows merrily round the yard: the odd-job pony leaps the fence and gnaws at the mangold clamp: the barn door swings unlatched and the ducks flop in and fight for turns at the hole in the meal-sack.

Market day is a good institution both for master and worker; it gives us a holiday from one another. For the rest of the week it is a good thing to do every job of the farm oneself some of the time—plough for a day, ditch for a day, work in the yards with the stock at the beginnings and ends of days. I would say that one cannot farm—not farm properly—any other way. Anyhow I cannot.

I cannot understand how business-men farm. Bailiff farming beats me: I cannot imagine how any man interested in the land can do it and retain his peace of mind. No—once-a-week, dog-and-stick farming may be a good hobby, but it allows too many chinks for the dribbling away of time, which is money, and efficiency. The man of business would not tolerate it in his own trade for a minute. Even in the engrossing task of writing: if I had composed a sonnet to rank with Shakespeare's, and it was running in my head, and I saw Strawberry looking into a dry water-trough, I should have to risk forgetting it to carry a pail to the cow. That is not virtuous, but involuntary. My part in life is that of the inspired ant. If only I can do *one* thing well, I cry: and farming is such a many-thinged thing, that my task is legion. To span the gulf between the piston and the sprouting wheat—you need a pretty powerful spark of inspired sanity to flash across that gap.

So I am reminded I must be even more master-cum-worker, more omni-present, as I survey the gaps in the ladder to the stable loft, and discover that we have only enough chaff to last the horses another week. And Walter's ostentatious second grooming of Boxer re-arouses my former determination to get a window fixed in the stable wall; and I see that Kitty has lost a shoe and Boxer's collar must be re-stuffed or he will get a sore shoulder. If the master is not a fusser, the farm goes *far oiente*.

'It's Monday, it's mud-day,' Sylvia chants, chuckling, bespattered, as she and the others follow the cart home with the last load of kale. It is an occasion: it is a milestone in the year. I am lucky, I am sorry, I am glad. Lucky that the winter has been so far open and my kale kept all its leaves and even sprouted some new ones late in January: sorry that I have come to the end of it; and must now start on the mangold clamp. (No, the vaulting pony has already started it.) Glad that I have dragged for the last time (by my own will-power, it seems) Kitty and cart through that dreadful sludge-way that was once a cart-way, from the kale-field to the road. The traffic of the last three months has turned what in October was a hard headland of oat-stubble into a morass of pits bounded by two deep parallel ruts. The pits were originally hoof-marks. They are all full of water. The last time we carted home kale from there, before Walter was laid up, sleet was falling. My left hand became so numb I could see it going through the motion of grasping but could feel nothing.

'What's the matter?' Walter asked.

'My hand's cold,' I said. 'Isn't yours?'

'My feet are cold,' he said. Perverse man, to complain of cold feet when handling half-frozen kale.

But to-day is milder: the kale is wetted with shower-drops that glitter in the sun after a spring-like storm, but is not too

cold for comfort. It is soaking stuff, anyhow, to cut and load: when you lift it into the cart, the capacious leaves tip the water they have been holding directly down your sleeve. I have plenty of helpers to-day—Martin and Sylvia, and Walter's two grandchildren, and another child we have picked up on the way. They rode out to the kale field. 'You will have to walk back/ I warned them. They were not deterred, though I think Nora would have vetoed the trip had she walked that way lately; but farmers' wives see more of the farm in summer than in winter. The children stood up in the front of the cart, Sylvia gazing at Kitty. She loves Kitty so much that no depth of mud would have kept her from accompanying us. When we entered the field and had skirted the muck heap with its heartening smell and steam, the cart went bump into the two ruts, and the children were amused to see the water which the wheels displaced swirling along the ruts in two miniature tidal waves ahead of us. The vast splashing of Kitty's hoofs in the holes was also a delight to them. Even more so, the sight of father's futile efforts to avoid these explosions of mud and water. Well, why stick to the ruts? For two good reasons. One is that last autumn I carefully ploughed the field we pass through to reach the kale, and I could not bring myself to mar those crested winter furrows and make a second morass beside the first one. Two is that nothing would have been spared but my personal mud-bath, for the fresh earth would have clogged on the wheels, whereas the water in the ruts keeps them clean. In farming with horse and cart the motto is not 'get out of the rut', but 'get into a rut and stay in it'.

So we reached the kale, which I had already cut, and the turnips which I had already pulled.

Really, the children are almost equal to another man loading: they run to and fro, from the heaps to the cart, each with one turnip or one kale plant, and heave them in. I find Sylvia struggling with a big one which she cannot quite raise the

additional two inches necessary to get it over the back-board. What fun children can get out of such unlikely things as turnips; dull enough, you would think, and all alike. They discover and delight in an astonishing variety: this one looks like **old** Mrs. So-and-so; that one is a pig, that a bottle, that a horse. The crop is full of freaks and fancies. There are some misbegotten swedes the prolonged drought warped into woody rootlets, and some of these have shapes for which the children can find no comparison; they are just excellent jokes of nature. It is good to be interrupted occasionally in one's work by children's exuberance; to be made to see nonsensical by-products of one's all-too-earnest striving. Good for one's humanity, anyhow.

We start homeward with the load. When we reach the sludgy track, Sylvia falls down flat on her face with a noise like a loud smack. She gets up, and goes straight down again. One of the other children is firmly fixed in the mud by one gumboot. I have to go and pull her out of the ground like a gatepost before the loaded cart can pass. Kitty snorts, stumbles, almost founders and recovers. Mud and morale: there are only about five hundred yards of this till the road is reached, but by the time we gain it I feel like a whole army in retreat.

Frequent flops, followed by shrieks of laughter behind, prepare me for what I am faced with when at last we come out on the hard road—five little objects of grinning mud, and ten outspread black spiders: occasional spots of rosy colour shining through the black grins. The rumble of the cart on the tarmac and the ring of Kitty's hoofs is music: we move on happily—the hard road rather than the picturesque rutted lane every time for me, when there's a job of carting. I take no responsibility for the children beyond their bodily safety. 'Nothing will clean you,' I tell them, 'but the mangold scraper.' Anyhow, mud is comparative. A speck or two can be a tragedy on some occasions: when you are splashed from head **to foot** you

forget about it. It is very unpleasant at the beginning of the winter; one tries to pick one's way. A thorough baptism is the only thing; complete immersion, and that comes soon enough. Thereafter one flops straight through anything.

I have one old overcoat: it has to do duty on the farm in rough weather, and still it just gets me slinkingly to church on Sundays under cover of a clean hat. The other day a neighbour overtook me as we walked out, and asked me in some concern if it had been a very bad fall I had had? The back of my coat was plastered with mud from the kale field. I had forgotten about it.

If Monday is mud-day, Saturday is slud-day. In fact from Saturday to Saturday, a whole week and more, we are muck-carting. Muck, mud, sleet, slud (which is a soupy mixture of all three) six inches thick along the cart-way from the yard to the road. I get it in the neck, I get it in the eye; I cop it, as they say, all ways, do what I will. I have a long leading rein; I have a yet longer one. I take hold of it by the very end, and stretch my arm out far behind me. Contrive like that, if I can, to guide horse and cart through the two gateways along the slud-way—nevertheless the hoofs of Kitty, and even more, the hoofs of Boxer, splash it lavishly upward and forward. It spatters my coat: a wad of it in which a pebble is embedded flies into my gum-boot: it showers on my hat as well as my sack-cape, and as I face round in trying to guide the horse, a particularly good shot hits me in the mouth. This from Boxer; his front feet spray more mud than would an elephant's.

'I heard you mobbing about something,' laughs Walter, looking round the corner to see me spitting out mud with male-dictions.

Walter said hopefully this morning in the stable as we harnessed up, I'm going to try a new idea.' Instead of his apron of a sack of yesterday, which, soon well sludded, flapped dismally round his knees and dripped into his gum-boots, he

bundled a sack round each leg from thigh to knee, tied it with string, and straddled forth with these pantaloons to start on our sixth day's muck-carting.

I think, as we fork out layer after layer of the muck in the yard, how all this was carted in, in the form of high loads of dry straw. That takes one back to the early autumn of last year, to memories of wielding the stack-knife in the hot sun, and heaving up the tangled straw; the building of the loads, the roping of them, the journey home, the tipping of them down in the yard, the spreading of them, and then shaking the straws from one's shirt, coat and boots, and going in to dinner—one more job done.

Now it is a reversal of the process; the building of a great dunghill in the field. A few months later there will be the un-building of that too, and once more filling the muck into carts and tipping it in little heaps about the field. Yet once more handling it, spreading those heaps, knocking it into shreds, before its final disappearance under the plough.

I have a friend who believes that the folk dance should still be an integral part of farming life. That may or may not be so: I have never seen a folk dance danced, so I cannot say. Suffolk is not a very light-footed county in my heavy-land experience: the clay is too adhesive. But when my friend affirms as one of his points of good husbandry, that 'the object of dung-carting is not merely the object *in view*, but also a satisfaction of social appetites'—then I must say that the three-times handling of dung is more than sufficient to appease our social hunger, even though we talk blatant local scandal all the time.

Although farming is not classed as a 'heavy industry' (which makes us smile ironically), we do get an allowance of meat pies and thermos flasks, and an extra ten clothing coupons. In these days farmers and workers live on their rations and export all their produce to the towns. This may be either altruism or just 'less trouble'. In either case it is in contrast to the last war,

Kitty, Prince and Boxer 17 when formers lived on the fat of the land, with hams, farm butter and cheese.

'Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn.' So I thought, seeing Winifred at her elevenses. (Haven't I introduced Winifred? Not W.L.A. but D.F.D.—Doughty Farmer's Daughter. Knows how, not merely willing to try. That is not to say one *expects* more of the W.L.A. or is unreasonable, BUT when there are fifty jobs crying out to be done in a hurry, what a relief it is to be able to say, 'Go and do this or that,' and know that it will be done in the right way with the right tool.) The elevenses consisted of dry bread and dry cheese. 'Not much flavour in this, except what the manure gives it,' she said, as we stood on the steamy mass.

I produced some coffee out of the standard green-spotted thermos. We emptied the flask, and I sought a ledge to put it on, out of reach of the inquisitive muzzles of cows.

We have just resumed our labour of the muck-cart when a tearing noise is heard, and we see one of the pedigree heifers—it is Iris—with a mouthful of Winifred's mackintosh. A long strip of the lining has gone; but luckily it is only the lining, and I am relieved to hear Winifred say it was a cast-off coat she had 'cadged' from relations with whom she stayed for her holiday: a man's trench coat, in fact.

I move the thermos to a higher ledge, lest Iris eat that too. How difficult it is to find a ledge when you want one: quite the opposite of Sunday morning when you are doing a bit of dusting indoors for your wife—then the rooms seem full of ledges and little fiddly bits that multiply themselves before your eyes.

Walter comes back from the field with the empty cart to exchange for our full one; and hearing of the heifer's mouthful of mackintosh, tells of a cow his father had which ate the kce curtains off the gooseberry bushes, and the linen bleaching on the hedge. 'She loved a bit of rag.' I was going to ask him whether his father's shirt or his mother's nightgown produced

the more milk; but he was now away back in India in the last war, telling of cows that scavenged the streets, eating paper, banana skins, and once very nearly a parcel of official documents which he had left strapped to his bicycle. It seemed quite a simple method of cow-keeping: the cow was milked before each house, and meanwhile ate the refuse of that house.

But our tale of muck and mud will soon be done. The yard is emptied: we cart in two loads of new straw, and the smell is quenched and all is clean and bright. The cows lie and chew contentedly: they love a clean dry bed.

3

The Wishing Tree

o N Sunday the children and I went up to our wood, and Martin said, 'Please pick me those catkins.' Anthea said, 'I want those pussy-willows.' So I broke off for them the branches over their heads; and Sylvia found some green woodpecker's feathers, and the winding path among the trees and bushes made our progress a sort of slow druidical procession, willow and catkin branches held aloft. It was interrupted every few yards by one or other of us catching our foot in a rabbit snare. We sat down on a gaping fallen tree, a sort of monster, and I said to them, 'This is the wishing tree, you must each wish a wish as you sit on it.'

They sat quiet for a minute, and I wondered if they really had wished. I asked Anthea, 'What did you wish?' 'I wished,' she said, 'that we should have lots of lovely apples from our new trees.' 'Martin?' 'That I could go flying up in an aeroplane.' Sylvia wished quite practically that the war would be over. 'Then we shall see a banana.' Mysterious fruit I 'What did you wish, father?' 'I wished for this little wood.' 'But

you've got this wood,' came the immediate chorus. Then I showed them the narrow undulations of the ground, still discernible under the mat of mossy grass and thorn. I explained to them that by those slight waves in the ground we can tell that this land had once been ploughed. It might—*might*—have to be ploughed again to grow food for people.

'I wish I could tell you the story of this wood,' I said; 'this wood that was once a field, before you were born or I was born, or even your grandfather was born.' 'Was it as long ago as that?' 'Yes, perhaps it was even longer ago than that. It would take so long to tell that story: Martin would have to cut down some trees and build a house round us, we should be sitting here for such a long while.' 'Begin to tell us then.' 'I don't know the beginning: I don't know the story. Nobody does now, only what those wavy shapes of the ground tell us, and that is not much.' 'Well, make it up. Yes, make up the story,' they cry. 'How can I think of it all?' 'Can't you wish, sitting on this wishing tree, and then it will come to you, all of the things that happened here.'

'I can guess,' I say, 'that there have been some fine horses on this land.' 'More finer than Kitty?' asks Sylvia. 'Well, as fine as Kitty. They often worked walking one in front of the other, I expect.' 'Not side by side? Why?' 'Because this land is heavy and flat and rather wet, so they ploughed it in narrow pieces—we call them stetches—of ten furrows each, with a wide open furrow between them.' 'What was the wide open furrow for?' 'So that the water would run quickly off the humpy part and away down the open furrows.' 'But why didn't the horses work side by side?' 'They may have done, but people were very particular in those days; they would no more think of treading on their beautiful earth, once they had it all ploughed up high and dry in those humps, than you are allowed to tread on the garden beds when they have been freshly dug.'

'So they harnessed their horses in a line, or far apart *side* by side, so that they walked in the farrows when they pulled the plough, harrows or roller—that old wooden roller with the little one behind,' 'I know, that old piece of tree that lies at the back of the cart-shed,' cried Martin. 'It's got iron rings round it.' 'And there's another, littler one with it, like a baby roller,' added Sylvia. 'Only it's fatter in the middle. A mummy roller and a baby roller. Where did the baby roller go?' 'It ran after its mummy,' I explained. 'It was called the kit.' 'Was it a kitten roller?' asked Sylvia. 'Of course not,' Anthea laughed. 'Fancy thinking a roller could be a kitten; though I expect it did sometimes look a bit like a fat little kitten, bouncing over the rough ground.' 'Kittens *do* roll,' Sylvia insisted. 'Our kitten rolled out of the manger where he was born.' Martin said, 'Go on father.'

'Well, the big roller stretched from the middle of one hump to the middle of another; but of course it didn't touch the low, open-furrow part between; so the little roller, the kit, was pulled behind, and that rolled the furrow. And when they went harrowing, the horses were harnessed so that each one walked in a furrow, and the same when they drilled the corn, though often they used to sow it by hand out of a sort of long box strapped on to the man who sowed; and he walked up and down, scattering the seed.' 'Like you and Walter do when you sow manure,' Martin put in. 'Yes, just like that, only it was more pleasant work: the seed didn't get up your nose and make it bleed, like superphosphate does, or in your eyes. And you had a proper box, shaped to fit round your front, with a handle to steady it by, called a seed-lip; not a rusty old pail with a sharp edge that scratches your hand, and a leaky bottom that you have to mend with a piece of tin or rag.

'So you see, children, those men who were in this field before it was a wood thought so much of this soil that they never let their beautiful, strong horses walk on it at all, from the time

it was ploughed till the time when they carted home the ripe corn, except in those narrow paths that the open furrows made. And they did have some fine horses; Suffolk horses, and plenty of them. Where you see two on a drill to-day, they would have four, and perhaps three on a roller or on a plough. So instead of the poor horses having to pull hard because they are few, they each had only a little to pull, unless there was one lazy one, who tried to make the others do his share.'

'I expect there was,' said Anthea; Mike Kitty when she is ploughing with Prince.' 'Kitty *isn't* lazy,' cried Sylvia indignantly. 'She ploughs as hard as ever she can: I've watched her.' 'But I've heard Walter say "get on, you lazy old mare".' 'She's not old, is she, father?' 'She's only nine; that's not old for a horse.' 'Well, children, let's be going on a little farther.' 'But you've only begun to tell us the story about the people who used to be here. Were there as many people as there are trees here now?' 'There were so many people here at different times, all busy growing corn and things on this land, that if they were all here together, why, there wouldn't be room for you and me to stand anywhere.'

'And how many horses?' 'Oh, there must have been hundreds and hundreds of horses, and perhaps oxen, who have worked here, from the time the first furrow was ploughed to the last time the soil was turned over and the last harvest carted away.' 'And what happened then?' 'Why, then, nobody came here any more, but only cows and sheep perhaps, to nibble the weeds and things that grew up.'

'But how did the trees grow up?' 'Well, I expect first a little bramble or thorn seed sprouted here and there, and the sheep or cows missed eating the shoot until it had grown a few hard prickles, and then they wouldn't, for fear of pricking their mouths. So the brambles and thorns grew up into big bushes.'

'But how did the oak trees come, and the silver birches?'

'I expect a bird dropped an acorn or some other tree seed into one of the bramble bushes, and it reached the ground, and a young tree grew up in the middle of the bramble bush, and the prickles of the bramble prevented the animals from biting it off until it was quite a tree, and then it was too tough. And so the field became a wood, very like what it must have been hundreds of years ago, when the first men came in here to cut the trees and clear the ground.'

'Why did they?' 'Because three people whom we might call Martin and Anthea and Sylvia grew up and had lots of children; so their children said, when they grew up, "there won't be enough food for us any more in the fields of our father, so we must make more of the forest into fields to feed us." And this was—and is again—the forest. Come along, children.'

It is not often, I should think, that the remark of a member of the War Agricultural Committee on entering a piece of derelict land, has been, 'What a beautiful wild garden this would make!' But then, we are civilised in Suffolk; so much so that we can see a beauty in wildness, always have been so since Suffolk has been parcelled into fields and intensively cultivated. This arable culture begets its opposite, an appreciation of a limited amount of wilderness, so that the old-fashioned farmer loved his plantations almost as much as his ploughed fields; he preserved their wildness, in a sense, just as he preserved game-birds and foxes, not merely for the pleasure of shooting and hunting, but of sitting and watching the birds and cubs at play. A wood was his recreation.

Admittedly, as soon as the above remark was made, the Committee man began scheduling ditches for cleansing and waste land for draining. Bjit our three-cornered two acres of wilderness will, I think, remain as it is; an objective definition of 'economically impracticable' in the midst of world war the second. It is an equation, really, between big wages and

big machines, prices and purchasing power, which works out at what you see, the old forest re-established on the wavy floor of a former peasant cultivation. We are not yet as hungry, perhaps, even to-day with war's worst upon us, as those peasants were.

So it is our wild garden and shall be, while we clear and till the land around; and the wishing tree shall remain in the midst of it, and we shall come here on Sundays and make holiday. Elsewhere thorns are prospective bush-draining material, or just a nuisance, shading the corn. I have cut down and burned thorn in full blossom, sweating in the mingled smell of smoke and flower. In the wilderness, suddenly, one sees it just as may-blossom, and has no other wish than to watch the bees in it and listen to the birds, while such associations as the may has ever had for English men (those who cut down this wood and tilled the ground) pass through my mind. They were not then, so strictly utilitarian after all? Where are their songs and ceremonies? Where, rather, is the child that was in their hearts?

Now we are moving slowly out of the wood, the three children in front, and I behind, in single file along the winding narrow path. Anthea holds her bow-shaped branch of silver-budded willow, Martin his of catkins, and Sylvia has a green woodpecker's feather stuck in her hair. They walk with silent, careful movements, holding up their treasures.

Spring: a week of clear sky, sunshine and warmth. Except yesterday morning, when the sun went up like an orange, and a cold mist descended. And it *was* cold, after the previous day which had me shed my coat even on the tractor. Sturt writes about the old farm worker loving his tools; and how the shapes of them and the memories that cling to them, along with his often dilapidated cottage, make up that sense of 'home' which is the only comfort of his old age—his whole 'philosophy' in

fact—and of which the workhouse robs him, wherefore he soon dies there, however kindly treated.

If this be true of scythe and spade, may it ever come to be true of the tractor? Or is there a fundamental difference between a tool and a machine, a difference of intimacy? Yet I shall remember my first Fordson. Yesterday, for instance, in the cold mist, pitching and tossing over the rough sea of a boulder-strewn headland, strewn with earth-boulders. The stack-yard field has a peculiar and thwarting nature. It has been pipe-drained, and still is wetter than any other field on the farm. And when it dries, it becomes a kind of concrete. Yet sand and silt pour down the open furrows all winter and fill up the pond.

One Saturday afternoon early last October, I said to Nora, 'I ought to go and finish ploughing the stack-yard field this afternoon, but we'll go and return the brooder we borrowed from Mrs. M., and have a cup of tea and a chat.' Which we did, it being a lovely afternoon. After that it rained and rained and rained. After which there was one more opportunity to finish the field; but on that occasion my temporary man put the tractor in the ditch. Thereafter it snowed. It was snowing as we dug the tractor out of the ditch, as we chained blocks of wood to the wheels, laid sleepers under it, all of which it flung away petulantly and continued to spin its wheels.

So it was not till nearly March that the headlands of that field were ploughed. The furrows dried hard enough to bend the crab-harrow's teeth in ripping them apart; and yesterday, in the dense sea-mist I drove my Fordson up and down trying to crush them.

Here, one day, barley is to grow: this scree has to become a tilth. The tractor plunges, wallows and scrabbles, puffs and moans. It is answered by the clank and groan of the rib-roller behind. I go home to dinner, and look at the garden earth raked fine for peas, and despair of my field. But back to the tractor: we

try again: harrow it after the rolling: a little better. The rest of the field, ploughed early, has caught the frosts, and breaks down beautifully. Oh that Saturday afternoon at Michaelmas, when we said, 'There's plenty of time.' In farming there is never plenty of time.

Alone in the mist, enveloped in a noise that completes one's solitude, I feel like one in mid-ocean on a little tramp steamer. You would think that when you turn the front wheels of a tractor, the tractor would turn. But no, when you are pulling heavy harrows it forges ahead, the front wheels skidding sideways.

Then suddenly the sky cleared, the sun shone out, and I took the tractor to roll and harrow the winter oats. A spring-like, new-mown-lawn smell came to me from the bruised blades, and the field of wintry clods became smooth, dark and green. There was a whole season of difference between morning and afternoon. So the tractor comes to have its associations of endurances and achievements, on which one spends so many lonely hours.

Last week it was winter: this week it is spring. That is literally true. Suddenly the wind is in the east, bringing white morning frosts after nights of stars as thick as frost; and cold, clear, drying days. I grow restless. Somebody is seen harrowing a field. The neighbours say, 'It's too early,' but each determines to try his own to-morrow. We go about and kick the earth, the furrows we ploughed 'in the slop'; and we are afraid now, not of the wet but of the dry. A few more fine days and they will be like cement. So hurry, fetch the cultivator, fetch the crab-harrows, break the crust, stir up the dark tilth.

The old earth is renewed, as the sour winter crust is broken and the under-tilth appears. It smells good, as though a process of replenishment has been going on beneath the surface. When at last you twitch the reins and say 'gee up', and watch the

teeth start combing through the ground—then should be your song, your celebration, your rogation. Plough Monday is dead to me: who would plough in January? Our ancestors did perhaps because they had to: they could not get their ploughing done before. Rogation-tide comes just a little late. There is a day in late March when prayer might be most potent, called for by the wheat blades quivering in the east wind that has dried the earth. When you release them from that hard crust, you release yourself from winter. Why no Wheat-Harrow Day? A day of cold early glory, and of glorious impatience. For between the resolve and the act intervenes a gulf. First, at milking time, the mind of Walter has to be attuned to the idea; made veer like a weathercock from its winter stance. To which end I have to be as the south wind, gentle but persistent.

'There's some power in the sun: the ground's drying nicely.'

'Frost's wholly sharp first thing.'

'I walked across the wheat yesterday: the ground's dried in a hard crust.'

'That'll be wet underneath.'

'It won't dry till it's broken.'

The noise of two people milking can drown what one of them says, if the other does not think it worth the hearing. Walter milks prestissimo: he makes the pails ring. I repeat what I have said. He pauses. 'We may get snow yet. There's time enough. Why, I remember . . .'

I suppose, if I were candid, I should say to Walter, 'Of course you are right. To-day even may end in a snow blizzard: it is only mid-March. But you know by now that at certain seasons I am filled with impatience, in spring and in autumn; and am mad to break the stale crust of winter or of stubble, and see and smell the earth again. But for your irritating caution this would be a delight to me. Don't protest that you are always right: I know it: I know that I always do at least one foolish thing in die spring—harrow beans before frosts are done

with, or put the cultivator through a ploughed field, oblivious of the wet that may intervene before I am ready to drill it. But the sun is bright, the hedges are green, the birds are singing; and I want to do something about it. I want to celebrate, and you don't: that is the difference between us.'

But of course I say nothing like that. I realise that I too am growing middle-aged and stubborn. Stubbornly clinging to the 'poetry' in farming, though of course we know that that is an illusion of urban minds. High delight and daring are not qualities characteristic of a good farmer. A good farmer faces 'full many a glorious morning' with the same face that he had for the cow which neighbour Brown was trying to sell him yesterday. It may 'flatter the mountain tops with sov'ran eye,' it won't flatter him. He is right. Really, I suppose, when the fit is on me, I ought to forsake my farm lands for a day, the day that begins too well, and follow the primrose path which leads to my wild places, and loiter among the leafing may, and under the silver birches and young poplars.

But I cannot do that, unless it is Sunday. Walter, now, *has* kindled an ardour: he is launched into reminiscence. His heroic times are all past times, back on the family holding, working with his father. Not this glorious morning, but an April snow that covered their young barley; not this present sunbeam, but that storm and cold it is which warms him. I know better than to try to divert his stream of memory: I can but let it run its course, longing as I am to discuss *this* day's work on *this* farm. Through long association, I do at least know his repertoire, and the duration of any one reminiscence. Even the wording, I find, falls into a pattern which has few variations. I see how little need former people had for the written word. Walter's mind has developed into a saga. My query of 'Where are the harrows?' wedged into one of his pauses for breath, is unheard or disregarded: the story goes its appointed course. But then, 'The harrows are up in the six-acres,' he says, and says no more.

Shocking, I think to myself; the whole winter has gone by, and the harrows are still in the field where they were last used in the autumn; and you call yourself a farmer. The harrows are at one end of the farm: the whippetrees are on the plough at the other end. To say, 'Let's harrow the wheat,' is one thing; but to do it—first Kitty must be harnessed for shafts and put in a cart. Then, slowly as she knows how, she drags the cart up to the six-acres. I pluck a switch from the hedge and touch her with it: immediately she makes a show of great alacrity. It is no longer even necessary for me to touch her: I have only to tap it every now and then against my legging, as a reminder that I still have it. Walter omits to do this when he leads her: he walks about a yard ahead of her: he drags Kitty, and Kitty drags the cart, Kitty is content.

I load up the harrows, and we trudge back to the farm buildings, and past them to the wheat field. There I unload them, which the journey has jolted into a solid mass of interlocked teeth, while Kitty tears at the young wheat. Then to get the whippetrees, then to take Kitty out of the cart, then to lead her back to the stable, take off her breechens harness, change the hames for those with plough-traces. Get Prince's collar on (he is quick to turn his backside to you as soon as unhallered if you don't grip his forelock), harness him, remember to take an extra bit of line to rein him back with, or the harrows will run crab-wise. And so at last we come out into the field where the harrows are. And so at last to the moment visualised it seems so long ago in the cowshed, of 'Gee up Kitty, gee up Prince,' and the teeth breaking the crust and combing the dark earth. Then at last one relaxes, almost with a sigh of relief; relaxes into the work, which has its pre-ordained pace. It is the getting to it that eats one up with hope, anxiety, impatience.

Now I look around at the headland, and see who else is harrowing, and hear what birds are singing. And stare at the

world, the variegated, sun-energised little world of a hedge-row; and have that feeling which I used to have in childhood, of the world staring at me rather than me staring at the world.

There is no stare quite so disquieting as the stare of a primrose, when you have just sworn at the horses for turning clumsily at the headland.

We talk of winter relaxing its grip. But the grip of spring is much more compelling. It is high tension. I must control something much more complicated than the most complex switchboard. I must be aware at the very pores, if I am going to farm well. And this tension in me corresponds to the tension in all growing things. I am tuned in—if you like—to the same wave-length, and being so, am more aware—vitaly aware—of the spring. It is not only the vision of process, but process in action in myself. Thereby work ceases to be work; it becomes will to effect, and the body the merest tool. Am I tired? The word has lost its meaning: there is so much to be done.

You don't begin to know the country until you have so much to do in it that you have no time to look at it. On Sunday, though, heavens, how I drink it in!

* What is this life, if full of care
We have no time to stand and stare ?'

I sometimes think is a foolish poem: for to stare at what you do not share, and have no mental and muscular encounter with, is merely to die into coma, or to start wondering when is it time for the picnic to begin.

England has no signpost to Nirvana. What a very good thing for us all it would be if the country scene ceased to be used simply as a sedative, a sort of aspirin to the urban constitution. Compared to the modern farmer, the townsman is slow, insensitive, and lulled to the expectation of automatic reactions

in all he touches. Yet advertising persists in presenting scenes of indolence and rose-bowered incompetence as *farming*, in order to lessen sales-resistance. Old men astride old horses gossiping for ever outside old inns; farmers leaning over gates; joy-of-harvest pictures of as many people poking about on one stack as would staff 200 acres.

And then, when farmers call for new equipment, and a plentiful supply of water, light and building materials, they are accused of uglifying, exploiting, destroying the spirit of the land. What of the rats that scurry round the old bam, and the snow that sifts down on the corn through the pretty pantiles? Waste is not lovely.

I insist that the primrose and the nightingale may live and be listened to on the modern premises of one who likes things clean and orderly.

Meanwhile, every time I pause at the headland, I notice a few blades of torn-up wheat adhering to the teeth of the harrows. This does not deter me; on the contrary, when I have harrowed the field once in the direction of the rows of corn, I turn and harrow it again, this time athwart the rows. More corn is torn up. On one side of the field is a railway cutting, and at intervals the trains rumble by. Sometimes they pass when the horses are standing at the headland, with their heads looking over the hedge on to the railway track. But the horses are used to trains: they do not stir. People stare out of the windows, faces comatose with long travelling.

'This is your bread I am walking on,' I tell them, though they cannot hear. When one thinks of this field of green blades as something that will keep that train-load of hearts beating, then one's work upon it takes on a keener edge: I turn the horses at the headland more carefully, keeping the traces taut, not letting one horse drag the other round. Where everything is so supple—cord, chains, muscle and flesh—there is a conscious art in doing well even so small a thing, keeping a due

tension between cord and chain and body. Those eight legs need some coaxing round.

By the end of the day I have apparently ruined the field. The blades of wheat, though vividly green against the darkened earth, look few and thin. The railway crossing-gate keeper, an old porter on temporary duty in the empty house, offers me a cup of tea over the hedge and tells me so. I am not perturbed. I have 'ruined' fields of wheat before. Payment for the tea is to listen to his reminiscence. Lonely all day, he has been awaiting this chance: my last round of the headland gave it to him. My payment, I fear, is a bit stingy: I hand back the cup, and thank him in one breath and call 'Gee up' with the next.

At the other side of the field old Mr. Winch is at work, finishing a piece of ditching for me. He reckons it will be the making of the crop, this drastic harrowing. One virtue of Mr. Winch is that he never stops work when he starts to talk. Spring flowers are already pranking the sides of the ditch lower down, where he started. Violets and primroses decorate our engineering, which is our field. If people could see a field more as engineering than just nature, then the engineer would come nearer the poet, and the poet to the engineer.

Drains and ditches, fall and outlet, texture of sub-soil and top-soil, direction of furrows: the primroses stare at me, my mind full of all this.

'Say not thou, what is the cause that the former days were better than these? For thou dost not enquire wisely concerning this.'

But we discovered a complete former drainage system, a hundred years old, when we dug out the ditches to the depth required by our new drains on this farm. Pipes of the shape we then found have not been made, I was told, for nearly a century. In the interval nobody had drained so closely, nor scoured out the ditches to the bottom, for no one who has worked on this farm knew of those pipes. They are the skeleton of a former husbandry.

Our last two rounds of the wheat field, combing out the earth of the headlands that the horses had trampled in turning, are done at high speed, because Prince knows that 'Round-the-headlands-with-the-sun-behind-the-hedge' means knocking-off time is near. He prances and sweats, wants no breather, drags harrows and Kitty, would drag half-a-dozen Kitties. Kitty's long legs also exhibit liveliness, willy-nilly. Prince stops short at the gateway. He knows. Traces unhitched and hooked to hames, whippletrees laid on harrows, to be off damp earth.

Then back to the horse-yard, where both Kitty and Prince drink from the tank out of which Walter says they will not drink; because it is fed by a pipe with well-water pumped by an engine. Clean water, avoiding thereby that former trampling into the pond, which being first thoroughly muddied, was then drunk in the form of an earthy soup. Finally, more often than not, Prince would leap out of the pond on the wrong side and career round the stack-yard, while Kitty galloped to meet him in the opposite direction. Perturbation and hysteria seized every animal on the farm, in which the shouting of people mingled.

To avoid this, and the imbibing of mud, the tank was installed in the yard. But Walter was convinced, before the first sod was turned for the well, that the horses would not drink this pure water. If you think that the evidence of a man's eyes should prevail against the accumulated dogma of tradition, you are mistaken in your countryman. He is tenacious of his horse-pond.

So round and round go the horses, and I shout to Walter in the midst of the melee, 'Why don't you let them drink at the tank?' And he shouts back once again, 'They won't drink that water.'

But this afternoon I bring them in myself, and they go quietly to the tank to drink. I do not let them drink much, because

they are hot, just enough to clear the dust from their throats. Did I say dust? Blessed, almost forgotten word. But dust there was, toward the end of the day, the proverbial peck of March dust.

The labour that our well and water-pipes save us, I only fully realised when we had a long spell of frost which froze the system, and we had to resort to carrying water in buckets to the cows and calves. It was the traditional Christmas-card scene, me with yoke and pails, breaking the ice on the pond (the yoke probably a piece of village craftsmanship), and trudging to and fro. The suggestion in the picture (I have several such in old books) is that there is nothing else much to do at this season anyhow. And if there is anything else to do, such as a bit of hedging or muck-carting, there are plenty of hands to do it.

What the artist did not suggest is that this is just one episode in a crowded day; that on a small farm the feeding of stock must be crammed into before and after, and the man carrying the pails is almost the only one to do all those other jobs too. In former days boys used to do the water-carrying, the root-pulping; and in summer the keeping of cows. There were plenty of boys, and not a few half-wits. Now we use pipes for the water, and an electric fence for the cows. Pipes are cheaper than boys, who do not want to work on the land anyway; and the half-wits, thank heaven, are fewer. The only local one I knew happened to earn, working on an aerodrome, more than our parson.

I remember Mr. Colville, the farmer who taught me farming many years ago, walking out into his farm-yard and shouting 'Boy!'; and a boy—or boys—just simply appeared and did his bidding.

Nowadays, when an accumulation of small jobs stands between me and my tea, I often think of that stentorian call for

'Boy!' I could make my yard echo too; but that would be all that would happen.

No boys, then, for farm work now; or very few, and the employment of them more hedged about with rules, rates of pay, and form-filling than that of adult workers. If you want a schoolboy to lend a hand in harvest, you have first to complete the requisite form and lodge it with his schoolmaster. And he does not thereby acquire a taste for farm work: no, there are more exciting vistas in the world of to-day. Exciting, that is it. Even tractor-driving becomes unutterably boring to him after the novelty has worn off. You need to have had an old-fashioned liberal education to like tractor-driving, and to be driving the tractor on land of your own. For then you are keenly interested in what is happening to the soil you are working.

Moreover, you need to have ploughed with horses first; because then you try to make your tractor-ploughing as good as horse-ploughing, and you know in what the excellence of horse-ploughing consists. You go carefully, because if you make a mistake there is no backing this outfit. It is an intricate and baffling task, trying to achieve exact mathematics within the dimensions of an old English field boundary. I often wish I had old Euclid riding beside me on the foot-board, when there is a stack in one place, a pond in another, a pylon in the middle, and two acute-angled corners. 'There,'¹ I'd say, 'now see if you can make a parallelogram out of that.'

Keeping in mind the quality of the work (the quantity, with a tractor-plough will look after itself) you go slowly, especially at the headlands. Oh, tractor-ploughing can be anything but boring. What then of harrowing, or, even more monotonous, of rolling? You sit on your tractor in the spring and simply draw your rib-roll to and fro over the young wheat till you have covered the field. That is monotonous; and that is where your humane education comes in, if you were lucky enough to have

had one, and not a mere technical training. The monotony sets the mind free. True, you cannot hear Nature, but you can see her. You sit and survey your farm, its trees, the sky above. I have travelled the whole length of a field, encircled by the flight of two swallows. Your thought can range where it pleases, and that to a farmer is a holiday.

A friend from town asked me, was I writing anything? I, puzzling over war-time labour and cropping, said no, farming to-day left little time for writing. He replied, 'Ah, well, it's good to. give *the brain a rest.*'

No, the tractor is not a machine for the country youth, who needs work of continuous challenge to keep his edge. Rather it is for poets and philosophers.

The country-bred youth looks round, and what does he see? Almost every cottage in his village a condemned cottage; officially condemned away back in the 'thirties'. No new houses, no light, and water in buckets from the pond.

Why should he stay? Who, then, will work the land? New people, out of love with the motives of their urban fathers. In love with labour and new tackle, with giving and enduring. In love with the edged tool of action, living the seasons. Drawing vigour from vision, its only true source. A great and tangled hedge of English country character and practice is before them, lovely in its wildness, but thorny with prejudice. With reverent but scientific blade they set to work on it. It is a work of re-civilization they are engaged in.

When you see once more the farm garden as well tended as its fields, and not a place of fallen trees, broken hen-coops and old iron; when once more a homely grace reigns in the farmhouse parlour, and not a cold clutter of tasteless furniture; then by these signs you will know that agriculture is again what it was and essentially must be—the basis of all culture.

4

For Pure Drinking and Clear Thinking

W HEN I had baited the horses, and watched them feeding for a minute, and said to myself once more, 'I will brush those cobwebs down from the rafters,' I climbed to the hay loft. In the end of the hay loft is a door, and what that door was put there for I do not know, because if you walk through it you commit suicide, falling on to the floor of the barn 50 feet below. I opened it, to speak to the village carpenter who was doing some repairs for me to a tumbril in the barn. The children were gathered round him.

I stood there, high above the animated group, listening to their voices. They were quite unaware of my presence; Mr. Handlock in his white apron among sawn pieces of timber and shavings, the children in bright colours round him. The immense rough uprights of the barn and the Gothic ribbing of the roof were on a level with my eyes. An old barn is always expressive in its structure and its lighting, and much more so when you stand high in it, as it were in the gallery of a theatre, and watch your own children in a scene of corn and carts and hung-up scythes below. I thought, this is my barn, those are my children, my horses that I hear feeding under my feet—all this my life.

Am I as much in love with my barn as I seem to imply? Yes and no. The pantiles, which match the pantiles of the house, glow a homely welcome as I come down from the field; but, alas, they let the snow in; it sifts over everything, chaff, sacks of corn and tools. I would welcome even a roof of sheet tin at six a.m. in January, as I stuff a mixture of snow and chaff into a bag with my bare hands.

The great empty vault of the interior can hold one in awe,

like the interior of a church. But God alone has a right to such space. Bounded by cathedral traceries it may become as the concave of a flower. This barn, though, was built to house the bread of lodily life, and when I am trying to get all my farming goods stowed away for the winter, it looks like a mighty waste of space up there.

As labour grows more scarce and dear, one's pre-occupation is more and more with arrangement and convenience. I have an idea that an upper floor to the barn will give this door opening on the void anew labour-saving purpose. But as yet it is a dim idea.

Mr. Handlock, who was supposed to be repairing a cart, was instead attending to a horse. This horse has given us a deal of trouble. For instance, on the afternoon of the day when I had had to announce, first that our best heifer (who had calved with her first calf at four gallons) had died in the night, and then that a fox had killed five of our pullets, Martin came in with the news that Boxer had broken his leg.

I jumped up from the dinner table. 'My God . . .!'

Just then Sylvia entered with Boxer, the wooden horse, too much sat upon, whom they had named after Boxer the plough-horse.

The children are always waylaying the carpenter with toys to be mended. New toys being unprocurable, I can hardly complain; and in any case no new toy horse could take the place of the two on which they have lavished so much care and affection, named after the real Kitty and Boxer. They tie rakes to them, and then are harrowing; and crooked pointed sticks that do for ploughs, unaware that they are re-enacting arable history.

In the spring Nora discovers little rows of corn appearing in her flower beds. When questioned, the children say, 'That's for corn for Kitty and Boxer in the winter.' The horses have a 'stable' under the side table in the living-room, where, when they are not being played with or mended, they are perpetually feeding, jacked up behind so that their noses are buried in a

mixture stolen in part from the kitchen and in part from the granary. Sometimes they have bibs on.

As I looked down from the loft, Mr. Handlock was disentangling a network of string from the broken horse. 'That's his harness,' Sylvia was saying. She had even found a pair of tin wheels on a spindle from an old toy, which she had made serve as a bit.

It was amusing to see the bird-like mystification on the children's faces when they heard my voice. They looked all around, then at one another, saying, 'Where's father?' Then, almost a little alarmed, 'Where are you, father?'

But Mr. Handlock, who knows all the old places for old doors in old barns, pointed out where I was. 'Can you tell me, Mr. Handlock,' I asked him, 'for what reason those who built this place put a door up here?' But even he, who is learned in all ancient practices pertaining to the land, could not tell me.

He, like Walter whose friend he is, is the son of a small farmer of the great old days, when a small farmer was a man so bred to traditional procedure, that his deftness with horse and tool made a rite of land work. No detail, no gesture even, must be omitted, and nothing altered. His father belonged to that 'complete' civilization which voluntarily arrested itself at a point beyond which it would not investigate, letting the divine mystery lap its little island like a huge ocean.

That man, and his son too, trusted in instinctive feeling rather than thought; and all his utterance rang with prophetic or moral issue. Not a man you could argue with. You began a discussion, but it always ended as a litany. This son of his knows all the ways of wood: wood is king of matter; he allows but a limited province to iron. He can chisel and mortise and plane to precision, as his father cast up exactly his ten-furrow stretches in the field; and to both him and his father the idea of putting a cart body on to an old motor axle and pneumatic-tyred wheels stank of some infernal heresy. 'That look so awkward to me.'

He meant that the outraged proportions of big body on squat wheels offended him. It was left to me (we were deep in discussion of carts and horses now) to suggest that the pneumatic tyres eased the draught. This he would not concede: how could he? But even so, 'How can a man unpitch corn on to a stack with a tumbril body so low as them wheels make it?' I suggested the use of the elevator for stack-building. 'But a man can't build a stack properly to an elevator.'

So there you are.

We then discussed the railing-in of the concrete water-trough in the yard, as a precaution against kicking by horses and rubbing by cows. 'Besides which,' I added, 'when the litter in the yard gets high, the cows, if they can stand too close, sometimes muck into the tank, and then the horses won't drink from it, and the whole thing has to be cleaned out.'

'Ah,' said Mr. Handlock, friend of Walter, 'that's not why they won't drink from it: they don't like the *nature* of that well water. It's not natural, you see; and it's cold from being in the earth.'

'No colder than any other, when it has been standing in the tank,' I replied.

He did not answer that, but told me, 'On my father's little old farm we had a pond right against the yard, like yours is. The horse-yard and the cow-yard drained into it: the muck juice stained it till that were the colour of old beer. Right thick it were; and stink—?! But the horses loved that water, and so did the cattle: they seemed to be regular mad for it. And if I took one of the horses on a road journey, he'd not drink town water nor any other, till he got back to that pond. I reckon it kept their old insides right, like medicine.'

This man is, I consider, 'educated' as completely as the old peasant hand-craft of rural England could culture a man. And yet he thinks that water stained with their own manure is not merely unharmful, but positively good for horses.

There is another kind of education to-day, in which Mr. Handlock's granddaughter is a participant. It is represented by a large, handsome modern building, well sited within its grounds on the outskirts of a market town. It is the area school. It is apparent from the outside that pains have been taken to make it harmonious in design: it has large windows and many of them. Inside, one is even more impressed: it is airy and warm, spacious and cheerfully decorated. Nothing has been skimmed. The atmosphere is not so much that of a school, as of some civic centre. To a certain extent it is already assuming that function, its large rooms being variously used in the evenings for farmers' and other club meetings, dancing, gymnastics and drama. It is equipped with a stage, cinema and laboratory. It is equipped also for cookery and domestic classes, and has, of course, a gymnasium.

This building looks like a first-rate instrument of modern civilisation. Some people complain that it draws away the life of the surrounding country into the town for the major part of the day, thereby undermining local loyalties and inducing an urban outlook. But the amount of 'urbanity' represented by a small market town is no more than the countryfolk with their bicycles have already assimilated. The idea of so thorough an insulation from modern trends is quite impractical anyway, and would not be good if it were possible. He who goes in for the life of the land to-day, must do so with his eyes open, and his mind perfectly made up as between it and what else life has to offer. The countryman cannot be taken into 'protective custody' any more. The life of the land demands no other hankering, but a whole heart. Else, who would milk cows?

Mr. Handlock's granddaughter is nearly fifteen, and has been at this fine new school ever since she left the small village one at the age of eleven. Her brother of twelve is still at it. The Handlock breed is still distinguished by characteristic peasant virtues. The granddaughter, for instance, expressed a prefer-

ence for cookery and housework when it came to the choice of a career, not typing or the retail trades. So she attended the cookery and domestic-science classes.

She has lately entered domestic service in the town. I happened to visit the house where she works one day, and the name of a neighbouring village on an envelope in the hall caught my eye. It was a letter from the granddaughter awaiting the post. The name of the village was wrongly spelt.

Later, I said to the mistress of that house, who is interested in education, 'That is a fine building, our local area school; beautifully equipped. And think what sacrifices the forbears of these countryfolk made to send their children to a little dame's school at 2d. a week. Yet all this first-class education is free.'

The woman answered, 'It isn't free: it costs ten shillings a week plus board.'

'What do you mean?' I asked.

'When that girl came to me she did not know how to take the core out of a piece of apple. It was painful to watch her trying to peel a potato.'

'But the cookery classes she has attended . . .?'

'Twenty in a class. I asked her.'

'The home, then . . .?'

'Mother did it all. A large family; no time to teach the child; quicker to do it herself.' The woman added, 'Her education is only just beginning: I am her teacher: she tries hard and is coming on well. But the education is not free; it costs me ten shillings a week plus board, which are her wages. Oh, yes, of course we pay for the area school as well, in taxes.'

i had to concede that there was something in this apparent reversal of the apprenticeship system, when I considered how my parents years ago paid £150 a year to a farmer that I might go as a pupil at the age of twenty and work on his farm. Now, an official wages table tells me that a person aged twenty is, after three months work on the land, deemed to be a fully-

trained employee, and as such entitled to the minimum wage for his age.

When I returned home from that house, I asked the Hand-lock granddaughter's brother about his school when next I met him.

'Well, what have you been learning to-day, Sammy?'

'Oh, we had a film to-day.'

'What was it about?' 'About science.' 'What science?' 'Chemistry and all that.' 'What branch of chemistry?' He thought for a moment. 'About all that there old oxygen a-carryin' on . . . Would you like some of these radishes I've just pulled? Have you any lettuces yet in your garden? Look at these.' He would hear no more questions of schooling that day, but would talk only of his garden.

Would you say then, that this great building is wasted? Yet if Sammy could understand something of chemistry it would enlighten him in his gardening in a way that his grandfather cannot. Do the children learn not even the spelling of the next village?

All the more reason why we must go on with our school; attract and train the best brains for the job. It is more baffling than farming against the weather, but there is no going back. People must be brought out into the light of civilised consciousness.

Perhaps then they will understand what they now vaguely feel; the lack that is in their life since the old modes have gone, which the cinema fails to fill.

Muscular and mental inertness will become intolerable to them, as it is to some who have already come through to a feeling that is driving them out of town life and town pleasures. There will always be work for arms and legs and backs on the land: we need hardly be afraid of machinery on that account.

Muscular slackness is a root of evil, which a hundred small daily indulgences make formidable in aggregate. The only

remedy for lassitude is hard work. See a man riding a horse drawing a cart out to the field—the 'Woa, mare,' the slow heaving of the body up while the horse stands still; the slow lowering of the body at the other end, before work can be resumed. For a short carting journey I find the rest of sitting on the horse's back and the soporific swaying of his walk infinitely more tiring than keeping going all the time. Starting after stopping is the painful part of work, and if you ride between loads, you are continually stopping and starting. Besides which, you can keep your horse going at a brisk pace if you walk beside him, but riding, a man cannot exercise the same degree of control, or is loth, to do so. The swaying gets into the blood.

There is a soporific spell over the old; the nerve and fibre have gone out of it. The reason is, the people who enjoy it, who feed their souls on it (and when it is threatened, their indignation), are seldom the ones who use it in daily living. They do not live in the ancient cottages, or if so, only after much restoration and re-arrangement made possible by long purses; and then not for long, and not happily. This I have seen many times with my own eyes. Nor do they live in the muscular swing of that former labour. They dote on it, but mentally, visually; not bodily. The germ is gone out of that wheat.

Now I have had occasion to live with, and use, and love both the old and the new. My daily life is a constant mingling of the two. One day I am ploughing with horses, another day with a tractor. A hurricane lantern serves me in one place, an electric switch in another. Oak beams and pantiles, sheet iron and concrete. The age is transitional: that is reflected in the daily life on even less than a hundred acres.

Daily, in all the acts of farming, I have found food for thought about these things. The basis is, that satisfaction comes not of looking at life but of living it, achieving something with it. If you keep cows, then you want to achieve an 800-gallon herd. If you grow corn, you want to grow 12 to 14 sacks to the acre.

There was quality in the old husbandry, in the enlightened horse-husbandry of last century; quality of work, but poverty of circumstance for the worker. There is quality in the old barn; and something more, a natural association. It appertains to the avenue, the grove. The tiny motor that pumps my water is also a work of quality. The engineer installing it, gave it an affectionate pat: 'Best little job on the market/

But you need to be an engineer to know that. Anybody can see what this barn stands for, even if they cannot express it. I am not sure that I can: in fact I am almost certain that I cannot. It gathers a mystery. If some wavering candle moves there, it becomes a church. What then, is this redolence, this old virtue which I find there; even while admitting that it is in many ways unsuited to the farming needs of our day? A religious quality which infused old work; some might say a superstitious quality. But at any rate an intensity of vision which presumed that one small harvest on one small farm concerned spaces beyond the stars.

Why does not the tractor radiate equal awe and wonder with former tackle? In Russia, if they blessed a plough, it would be a tractor plough. They have at least charged modern tackle with the current of a fervour. Even their banner, though the symbolism is manual, represents an idea that our rulers cannot yet stomach—an equal partnership between industry and agriculture.

Unless civilisation is blotted out completely and simultaneously all over the world, man will be able to command mechanical power. Oil and coal may give out, but we have discovered the dynamo, and as long as there are winds and tides we can make electricity. At present we have the dynamo, but we have lost our own dynamic. The dynamic of a spiritual power which was generated for former men by church and barn, as they struggled with matter. Is it a law of our nature that when the sense of struggle is mitigated, the dynamic should degenerate?

Take a windy spring morning, when the earth's surface, staled by long winter, desires to take that boisterous air into all its particles, like a lung. You sit on your tractor, or stand riding it like a ship, with the soil stirred up in a wake behind you. Gulls wheel in the air above, and great clouds race across the sky. 'O God that gave us this power . . .' is the cry of an impulse that makes you feel one with all this. Why should not a hymn to the Holy Ghost be inscribed on the magneto cover, or over the portal of the power house? Should not a modern grain silo be created and carved with all the symbolism of corn? Should it not be itself a superabundant symbol of corn? Would not men of art be better employed thereby than in magnifying their own private dreams?

If we really believe in modern machinery paving the way to an enrichment of personal life, let us not use it with soul averted to the things of yesterday. We still talk of putting our *hands* to the plough. Would it not be better to bestow our spiritual enthusiasm on our actual daily life? The present duality is intolerable. Manifestly it can be resolved; but not by the methods of Victorian industrialism. The clear genius of an untainted people is needed. The Scandinavians have that clear genius, the Swedes, the Danes. To them, modern power on the land does not mean large-scale industrial farming, on the contrary. Nor in building, does it mean gimcrack bungalows. They, if anybody, can make something of it that is calm and sane; happy, lovely: convert it to the service of posterity, family and home.

But a new thing is happening even here, on our own land. It is happening slowly, but is of an importance to the future, which only posterity will be able fully to appreciate. It is nothing less than the displacement of the hereditary farmer and farm-worker by a new people altogether, a people who are giving up the life of industrial cities and coming out on to the **land**. Their primary virtue is that they **are ready** to learn: they

do not pretend 'I have run a large factory, therefore to run a 200-acre farm will be child's-play to me.' They know that it is infinitely more difficult: they recognise that in the farm they are up against the hard core of a reality not previously encountered. They are not the former romantic sort of back-to-the-lander. Neither are they crudely industrial: industrious, rather. They find friends among the good farmers: they are scoffed at by the small mess-and-muddle men. I will not call these latter peasants; for that is an honourable name: these men are thoroughly decadent, retrograde: the descendants of those who mocked at Jethro Tull and his corn drill, and have derided every new thing since. They are responsible for the scrub cattle which are to be found in this country, and incidentally for the tuberculous joints of many citizens who have drunk the milk of their infected herds.

I too have been inclined to scoff at the idea of townsmen with no equipment but capital and enthusiasm making good on the land. I freely admit it: I admit that I misjudged the portent, and their sticking-power. I had been alone among the former people too long. This is the sort of comment I heard. 'Mr. X. what's taken old Charlie Cott's farm—come from London, I'm told.'

'Does he know anything of farming?'

'Na-o.' The tone of that a long-drawn-out note of contempt.

'He's a queer client: ordered a whole churn of milk to be kept back, because Jim, what's worked there all his life, put a little milk from a cow that's nearly dry—the milk had 'turned' you see—into it by mistake. As though that little would have been noticed among the lot.'

There are others. As a farm here and a farm there falls vacant, the old farmers dying or retiring, these new people have been acquiring them. Their devotion to their task, and the quiet austerity of their lives has impressed me. They form nuclei, in the most out-of-the-way corners, of thinking, sociable people,

bent on producing clean milk and good food from land kept in high fertility. Willing moreover to discuss and experiment with new methods.

It is no longer the old sort, the burly, individualist hunting and shooting men, whom you meet at markets. Or if you do, they are in a minority. These others do not spend long at markets; are never in taverns; their business done, they hurry back to their land.

These people are going to pull through. They are actually superseding the traditional type of farmer, and stepping into his place. I have become aware that it is not one or two eccentric townsmen taking to farming for their health, but a tide, a major revolution taking place before my eyes. Sons of professional men work in the place of farm labourers: engineers who pray and plough are farmers. These men, if any, can harmonise work and faith once more, and make country life both comely, sociable and fruitful.

This is our day. John, the professor's son, lives 'in' with us. (Besides Walter, he was for a time my only helper.) He takes a lantern into the stable and grooms the horses while Walter and I milk the cows. Walter is happy to milk by the glim of his old black-hatted lanthorn. The black-out restrictions have been lifted, and the old black hat has come off, but the light is not thereby increased, but continues to be seen through a glass darkly. I am careful to ensure that the wall lamp is kept full of oil, and its wick trimmed. The lanthorn stands on the ground until Walter has milked a cow, then he lifts it to the milk-recording chart, and thinks that he sees better thereby to note down the figure. The lanthorn is lowered again, but then a doubt about the correctness of his marking jogs him, and up it is lifted. The back view of him raising and lowering the dim flame has a ritualistic look.

"Tohn may be beard at intervals conversing with the horses.

As daylight dawns, the filled and measured churns of milk are set clanking onto the barrow and wheeled to the gate. The milk lorry comes with a clatter, and clankingly takes them aboard, and even more clankingly throws out empty ones in their place.

Then we have breakfast; Anthea dressed for school, the twins planning their play, and playing geography with their porridge. 'Mine's Australia.' 'Mine's England. Milk please; there's not enough sea.' 'More sugar.' 'You've plenty: don't be greedy.' 'Please, there's not enough snow on England.' 'I want snow too.' 'Australia doesn't have snow.'

The post comes. The post girl has also been nurse to some children in the near town; has driven a crawler tractor for the Committee.

After breakfast we drill oats with the tractor, John and I; while Walter comes behind, harrowing them in with the horses. At the end of the day we bring our tackle and horses home—a little late, announces the chorus of cows. They stand in a semi-circle focussed to a point. That point is the cowshed door.

We put the food in their mangers. A gale has sprung up from under a thunder-cloud, and makes a crisis of the opening of a door. The cows crowd in. A row of ridge-tiles is suddenly whipped off the barn: pantiles whirl about like birds. 'Quiet should be maintained in the cow-byre at all times: cows are nervous animals, and the clanking of pails disturbs them.' Bang—bang—bang I Down come the pantiles on the tin roof of the cowshed. I sec there is a chimney-pot less on the house. I see that a large fowl-house which was standing in the meadow, is now standing (upside down) in the garden.

We collect the tiles that are whole, and Walter fills a hole in the yard with the fragments. In the midst of hurricane and crisis, he does some tiffing little job like that. Then we settle to milking. 'No dusty matter should be stirred while milking

is in progress.' Tell that to the wind that is whistling through the ventilating system. John feeds the calves and heifers. We struggle with runaway hay. I seem to have been chasing that hay since it was grass. Forking it on to cocks, wisps of it escaping. Forking it upon the wagon, wisps of it escaping. Leading the wagon homeward, wisps shaking off on to the road. Forking it on to the stack, wisps escaping. Now carrying it to the cows, great bunches blowing away.

At six o'clock we sit down to tea. I push the door to behind me to shut out the giant. Phew—what a night! Here's tea and hot macaroni cheese and toast and a good fire and a bright light. The shutters are up: the stove sighs. What a wonderful thing is a house, is a room: all this comfort made out of earth, baked, and laid brick upon brick. The act of bricklaying is beautiful; the action of the trowel, scooping and smoothing; the plumb-line and level.

A car outside: is it? The door opens: enveloped in gale a friend comes in. It is the woman vet. who works for the insemination station. She motors all day from farm to farm many miles. There is always a place for her here; food and tea and a fire. She has usually some amusing story of her day's work. Some farmers are shocked that a woman should undertake such a task, until they are impressed by her manipulative skill. Others treat it in its scientific light; even to one who, after showing her all his beasts, his garden, his fruit grafting, sent his wife upstairs to bring down for our friend's professional inspection his new set of false teeth.

Our talk turns to cattle and crops, as the evening talk of many must have done under this century-old roof. But to-day it is different: it is of the analysis of kale, of bovine metabolism, of the possible cause of the hair coming off some of my cows in patches—some mineral deficiency? To Walter that is as natural as moonshine: 'That always do happen to them in the winter.'

Thence we pass to the question of the determination of sex

in calves, and some research our friend is doing on it. To the glands and their complex, specialised functions. To the human glands, and the hosts of combatant bacteria we house, and how our bodies resting here after labour owe their peace to that critical balance of power. Till someone suggests, is not each of us, perhaps, a bacillus (beneficent, we hope) in some unimaginably greater body?

So, about the time the fire is turned to flameless incandescence, we feel the greater question pose itself: what commands and co-ordinates all these stealing and mysterious functions that hold a man in health and normality? Normality—the miracle of our every moment. Our forefathers told each other ghost stories, spoke at midnight of weird and awful apparitions in churchyards; heard footsteps of the invisible. To us the fact of being here in breathing health is the full mystery.

Science widens our frontier on the unknowable, and should deepen the scope of prayer. Specifically, we are lifted beyond the question of machine versus muscle for motive power. We come to a unity of principle in motion, a problem which the tractor (do you remember that day of the demonstration, and the diagram of a tractor with its internals exposed, how like rudimentary guts they were?) solves crudely and the Divinity with excellent and incredible fantasy. Only the Creator could afford such a glorious accessory as the horse's mane and tail, or dare such a development as to poise his great weight ultimately on four toe-nails, which are what his hoofs really are. To make the puller of plough and wagon walk a-tip-toe—could Ford have dreamed of anything analagous to that?

So we come out under the wind-swept stars to say good-night. We stare up at the firmament for a minute in silence. Not maypole dances nor the wassailing of orchards will propitiate its mystery for us.

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A Gift of Apples and Old Tales

THRESHING : or rather, awaiting the threshing machine. It is almost the same thing: you are in for it as soon as you say you want it when it has finished at your neighbour's. You've got it coming to you; you've asked for it. The interim is about as cheerful as waiting at the dentists. In imagination the outfit is in your yard, humming inexorably, and you are piecing out the labour; men, girls and half-men. Oh yes, there are half-men, with illusions about their worth that the girls have not, and less cheerful to work with. But you pay them as much as the men.

You fall asleep with the gang arranged; the whole men, the good men and true, standing out in a nimbus of your gratitude. You wake in the morning, listening to the rain, and juggle them all about again. The rain is a sort of reprieve: you are cheerful in spite of yourself at breakfast, yet you wish it would not rain. In any case, the imminence of threshing paralyses the work of the farm. Coal and water must be carted, the barn cleared, sacks and chaff-bags collected. Is everything ready? Yes. But there is always something you have forgotten. The 4-pound weight is missing, or there is no rake for the cavings.

'The red monster has so many orifices, from which spout all manner of goodness and refuse, into which those seemingly simple sheaves have been smashed and sorted—grain, good and broken, in two brown cascades; straw, chaff, cavings, and dribblings of weed seeds and rubbish. Everywhere this stuff comes pouring it, a gross and itchy dust, thick as smoke, as though the monster were verminous and scratching itself. I cannot believe that my good crop harboured such flesh-torturing particles: these must

be some other farm's thistle-spines and little bristly things, brought here ?in the machine.

Against this dust the land-girls dress themselves in scarves and coloured handkerchiefs—one over the head, and one draped across nose and mouth. They are like Arabian women, only the eyes visible. They stand in the dust, and walk through it, carrying chaff and raking cavings—the monster's harem. They sing; and the girls on the stack sing also as they ply their forks, and the moan of the machine is permeated by a movie theme-song, all blue and true, sorrow and golden to-morrow.

And so we finish our last bit of threshing. But what a cumbersome business it is. It spoiled two days of the brightest and busiest weather, threshing 100 coombs, with the help of four land-girls and two Italian prisoners whom I have just engaged for the summer work. We have made billets for them out of a hackney stable and harness room attached to the house, by means of plaster-board, colour-wash and a stove, and odds and ends of furniture.

We have promised the children that when the Italians return to Italy, this room shall be their very own play-room, hobby-room, or whatever they like to make of it; an idea which caused them to jump for joy.

We started threshing at eleven o'clock (the tackle arrived, with a leaking engine, at ten). At three, the chain of the elevator broke and took an hour and a half to mend.

Our first day's threshing produced 21 sacks of barley. The second day (finished by twelve-thirty) produced 74 sacks of wheat. I had the four land girls on my hands for the rest of the day. The previoxis morning, while awaiting the threshing tackle, I had set them to picking kale stumps off the land. There was more of this to do; but as Toni and John were due in that same field that afternoon to cut a load of kale, I guessed that fraternisation would hold up both jobs, so *to the girls'*

delight I let them go home at three p.m., after they had finished carrying the chaff up to the loft.

'What do you want to do now? Go home?' I asked them.

'Oh, that would be wonderful/ they chorused.

'What'll you do?'

'Oh, wash and change, and get ready to go out this evening.'

They had worked so well in the dust and filth of the drum, that I gave myself the indulgence of releasing their youthful, unmitigated delight; especially as I myself was due out to a tea-party that afternoon.

After forking sheaves in clouds of engine smoke all morning, I was black as a sweep. I hurried indoors, jumped into a hot bath, soaped my face neck and ears over and over again, with Nora as my 'mirror'.

'The creases of your nose—just once more. That's better. Your eyes? Well, they look all right now; just rather emphatic and interesting.'

Driving home from the party, we found that our country road became an aerodrome. There was a sentry-box with STOP, and a white-hatted U.S.A. policeman. He was not a bit interested in us, so we did not stop, and soon found ourselves on the runways. Rather startled by this, we turned and regained our road at the STOP notice, the military policeman still eyeing us like a bored man does a fly. Our road became a country road again; aerodrome abruptly ended, old England began.

On Sunday, Toni told me of his farm in Italy, for he is a farmer farming over a hundred acres. He told me of the wheat, wine, olives, cows, poultry, of his wife and child. By much dumb show and a little broken English, we manage to understand one another. Carlo, his pal, who knows more English and is our interpreter, was out. All Toni's food is home-grown and home-made. He drew a diagram of his big bread-oven. He

retains 20 to 30 sacks of wheat for his bread, and feeds five farm workers: kills three pigs, makes bacon, and sausage which is dried and pickled in oil. He drinks his own wine. He gave me to understand that he could not afford to sell all his wheat, milk and pigs, then go to the shop to buy bread, butter, cheese and bacon. He thinks English farmers most unthrifty to do so. I tried to explain the regulations.

He asked me to buy him a bottle of 'violet oil for the hair' with part of the pocket-money he is allowed. He is a man six years parted from his wife and home, all his brothers and brothers-in-law are dead or missing, yet he still presses his trousers under his straw mattress, and anoints his hair with violet brilliantine.

Toni is as tiny as John is tall. Yet he carried sacks (18-stone) of wheat into the barn without any trouble. I try to speak Italian to him with the aid of a phrase-book. Before I am half-way through a sentence, he says, 'That's all right boss, you tell me in English.' So my attempts to learn Italian are frustrated. There is one phrase common to them and me, and I think every nation under the sun. 'O.K.' It is the first global word.

We have had several days of intermittent rain: the hum of tractors, which filled the air, has suddenly ceased. The cherry-plum tree, in full flower, begins to shed its petals and put on its leaves. There is a humming, not of tractors, but of bumblebees. Through garden lattices of spring the early flowers flash suddenly to my eye—daffodils, hyacinths, primrose clusters. I seem to see them all for the first time in an evening hour of leisure, and am surprised at their earliness. Our spring flowers are late in East Suffolk. Did I say leisure? My file is fat with forms not filled up, returns not made, P.A.Y.E. not totted up, farm accounts a week behind. But if there is not time to look at a wall-flower and re-collect oneself, there is not time to live.

Now in the fullness of spring and the fullness of work, I miss old Mr. Merry. He had lived longer here than almost anyone can remember. All summer he would stand at his gate, like a ghost in the sun. As you came near, his eyes stared, his lips moved, but most of the words he uttered were lost on the way. In any case, with the cart or rib-roller clattering behind you, it was hopeless to try to catch what he was saying. You just smiled and answered, 'Yes, isn'tit?' or 'No, I expect not'; whichever seemed apposite, and passed on. There was not time to stop, not in the spring. If you did stop, the result was not a conversation but a monologue. The little far-away, rumbling voice went on and on, like thunder far in the distance. Occasionally you caught a word or two: 'they' were doing something; but whether they were knights in armour, or even the followers of King Edmund, you could only judge by the fixed and timeless visage, and the distance his voice seemed to have to travel to reach you, like a telephone call from the dark ages.

He would follow me to the field, where I was trying to obtain a tilth on some late-ploughed root land which missed the frosts. He was telling me how 'they' did it. The rib-roller started clanking across the field, but his lips persisted. 'Yes, yes,' I called back, 'that was the way.' I did not know what way. The clods were big as lumps of kitchen coal: the old man could hardly stand on them. As I came across the field again, he was creeping back to the gate. He had given me up. But in a little while he came hobbling out again (he was very decrepit) with a coal hammer, and began tapping at the clods. He would show me how! Immediately a picture of 'they' came into my mind, wearing tunics and long-toed shoes, banging away with mallets at their medieval clods.

I finished my rolling by dinner-time, and as I came back to the gateway I saw that Mr. Merry had gone; but where he had stood was a space of about a yard square of finely broken earth.

Yes, that was the way. If there had been a couple of hundred of him, this field would have needed no further cultivation by me.

In summer he produced apples from his pockets, and offered them to me or my land-girl as we passed. Offered is hardly the word: his generosity was insistent. As soon as he saw me coming, his hand moved to his pocket. Re-appeared again dragging at an apple which dragged out the lining of the pocket. The apple became stuck half-way just as I was passing him. 'Hey—hey!'; his other hand with stick, went out, as much as to say, 'Would you pass this beauty?' No, there was no passing: I had not the heart. Apples were his all, which he loved to bestow. I never did know how he picked them: banged them down with his stick, I suppose, while his little dog barked. Barked at the whole world, did that little dog.

So I waited, dog barking, lorries approaching, Prince pawing, time flying, while the slow process went on of extracting with senile fingers an apple from a pocket that was too small for it. Oh, the agony of the apple: the hay lying out, the clouds boiling up: still I must wait. 'Oh, thank you.' Thank God, the apple is out. I crush my teeth into it, regardless of old pocket odour. 'Gee up, Prince.' Now there is sweetness, there is assuagement. You haven't wasted so many minutes, after all. Assuage your impatience: Walter wouldn't have worried. He couldn't. He would have talked of 'they' with Mr. Merry at his gate, receiving not only the apple but the anecdote, or exchanging anecdote for apple.

And did 'they' in their day talk of yet more distant 'theys'? Did the past loom so big to them? Then when was the work done? Old men sniffing the air for breaths of the heroic past, gathering up all into 'That day lightning struck the old mill.' it is an ancient labourer; and he stoppeth one of three . . .

Yet the work was done: the corn was carried. But they did not have to grow sugar-beet as well. The cows were milked; but fewer of them, and with little, if any, preparatory cleaning

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Already it is milking time: look at the sun. Late for milking. Is there another way back? There is none. Mr. Merry stands at his gate. Remarkable sight he has: I am a long way off, but already his hand is stealing to his pocket. His other hand to his other pocket. Pray heaven it is a smaller apple or a larger pocket. I come near. It has reached the stage of the struggle with the lining.

'Here, now—just a minute: wait a minute. Here, now, try that one. That's not much to look at, and you'll have to cut out that bad bit (it's been in my pocket several days), but that's a sweet apple for this time of year. Now that tree . . .'

On another day I have Martin with me; and I send Martin across to take the apple that is being slowly brought forth, not from either pocket this time, but from under his hat. Martin is expectant, not knowing quite what Mr. Merry is fumbling after in that old relic. 'Father.' He comes running after me. 'Mr. Merry had an apple in his hat.' That one should hoard such a thing in such a place, and then give it away! 'Thank him very much for it. 'Thank you very much for the apple,' he calls. The old man is overjoyed. His face seems to strain forward and glitter. That was apple-giving at its best. Martin bites into the apple. A thought strikes me: a mental picture of the inside of the hat. 'Martin,' I call, 'here a minute.' But he has already taken three more bites. Never mind: I'll not tell his mother.

Then autumn came, and November. The apples dwindled, and did not keep well in the pocket. Journeys to the field were fewer. I finished ploughing, and drew the plough homeward.

Mr. Merry stood in the path. I stopped and stared at him in the noise of the tractor. His lips were moving: he was telling me something about a stoat. He bestowed the last apple.

He stood at his gate no more after that, but stayed indoors for the winter. Once he came out for an afternoon, like a bee in a burst of mild, untimely sun. He took ill and died before spring.

And now, it is strange, but I miss that old man.

Walter too misses him, as he does the cobwebs which I have at last swept down from the stable rafters; another piece of the old familiar world swept away. Another 'they'-talker gone, for whom the clods were full of dreams. Not 'This land lacks phosphates,' or 'is deficient in lime,' but 'That's funny old dut; that fare to run together like a pudden if that's ploughed in the wet.'

Mr. Merry used to help Walter's father sometimes on his holding. One can guess at those times, piece them together from certain phrases as an archaeologist does fragments of pottery. A recurrent introduction has been, 'Somehow it happened we were a bit behind, that season.' Wandering far, I guessed, after a load of hay or the service of a bull. Laborious procrastination, lightened by 'they-and-then' talk at every twist of the road.

But there came a day when the hay—or the corn—must be cut. Then, as father and son scythed and sweated till sunset, and still there was much to do, along comes Mr. Merry, his day's work done, and swings his scythe alongside them, and the field is finished in moonlight, and they talk about it for years afterwards. Which event, I anxious now to get started on that field with the grass mower, have first to hear all about: nothing can be begun until that tale is told—is exhausted of its every detail.

Thus laborious procrastination, leading to bursts of heroic effort, begets further procrastination; and only the natural

death of man at three-score-years-and-ten keeps it within bounds.

Another phrase with a world of meaning is the often repeated, 'As my father used to say, "that'll fill them if that don't do nothing *else*".' This of any rough, bulky stuff, such as heads of threshed wheat (cavings), or bean-straw which I was tipping into the yard as litter for the cows. Walter has been shocked to see it so used, and not hoarded and fed in the mangers. 'As my father said . . .' I hardly believed him serious at first—the idea of trying to produce winter milk by stuffing the cows with straw. But he was. Moreover, he assured me that cows will eat dried rushes, and even the straw of linseed (which is linen, and tough as wire) if you mix it with other straw.

Then I saw that his father's farming, and that of innumerable small farmers before him, had been founded on scarcity. It had not been a question of what food is best for milk-production, but what can an animal be induced to eat just to keep itself alive? It takes one straight back through the centuries to the medieval peasant farming of England, in which winter was synonymous with famine. Not the man-made scarcity of war, but that natural scarcity which haunted mankind till the little band of derided pioneers, two or three in a century, discovered how to avert it by new crops and methods. And that before the advent of power-farming, so-called. It was done by the few who could think, who could contemplate; while the many, die small traditional farmers, struggled on without hope of amelioration, happy enough if they had something that their cattle would eat, something that would 'fill them'.

Walter is in the direct line of such men; and even to-day his thinking is based on the agricultural poverty of pre-enclosure days, long before the Suffolk of Cobbett's Rural Rides, whose fields were full of swedes, twenty tons to the acre, and fat sheep basking in the sun. Jethro Tull, Coke, Bakewell, Townshend—the effect of their work percolated very very slowly to the

little farms, how slowly I can well realise among men who hold to every detail of traditional procedure with a religious zeal. Walter as a young man broadcast wheat in the furrow, while his father drove the horses dragging a wooden-frame harrow. They mowed their corn by hand, and carted it on a harvest wagon of which the village's oldest inhabitant, nearly ninety, says 'I remember seeing that wagon in a farm sale when I was a boy, and it was an old wagon then.'

As for threshing: one of Walter's tales is of when his father took the small farm, and how they found an old labourer in the barn with a flail threshing the former tenant's crop. His food was on a ledge at one end of the barn, and his drink on a ledge at the other end. He had a bite, then threshed his way across and had a drink: threshed his way back and had some more to eat; and so on all day.

Simplicity: that was the key-note. A flail, a plough, a wooden harrow and a wooden roller. Scythe, pitchfork and cart. That was all. To-day the farm buildings are quite inadequate to house the variety of machines required. So several have to stand out in the rain. It is not unusual to see £40-worth of painted new machine wintering under a blackthorn bush. But those men would not complicate life by the introduction of labour-saving mechanism. They preferred to work hard, laboriously to procrastinate! A new thought would derange the achieved balance, the usage of the mind. The few ideas moved in a seasonal procession, in at one end of the year and out at the other. Memory was the altar. They had achieved completeness.

As with tillage, so with livestock. Since the days of Bakewell we have been concerned with selective breeding. Before his time long legs were considered a good point in farm animals; because they had to run so far in search of food.

In milk production, the pedigree of the bull is known to be of great importance. But this, out of Walter's own mouth, is how his father set about it. 'There was a cow of his on stock, so

he took and drove her to Mr. Cott's farm in the next parish, where they kept a bull. When he got there, they said, "Oh, you should have come yesterday—we sent our bull away to market this morning. But Mr. Holden, of Sumpton, he keeps a bull." So off my father goes to Sumpton; that'd be a good three miles further on. When he gets there, "Yes," they tell him, "we did have a bull, but he got too heavy, and we sold him last week." "Well now, what am I to do?" said my father. "My cow's on stock and Mr. Cott's sold his bull, and I don't know where there's another."

' "There's one at Mr. Throstle's at Chiddleton," someone says. "But that'd be another four miles," my father say, "and it's getting too late: I shall have to let her go over this time." So he took the old cow home again. Well, next-day morning, dashed if she weren't still on stock. "The old cow's still on," my father say to my mother; "I'll take her to Chiddleton, for I don't know where there's a bull that's nearer. So pack me up a bit of dinner in the old red cloth."

'So off goes father with the old cow again, and at last he gets to Chiddleton. "A bull," they say when he asks at Mr. Throstle's; "Yes, bor, we've got two; but they're only young mites o' things as yet: they ain't neither on 'em never jumped a cow. But we can let 'em out and see." So they opens the door of the box, and out run they two little bulls like mad things. One jumps on to the cow, and the other jumps on to the back of the first. And father come home with the old cow tidy late that night, tired right out. He says, "I don't believe that's been a mite 'o use."

'And time went on, and time went on, and after all the old cow had twins.'

And so it went on. The lay-out of that old husbandry is still with us: it is the shell of our farming to-day. Adaptation: it is that all the time. They built places for pigs, and you adapt them

for calves; for horses and you make them do for cows, I was walking behind the drill this afternoon and thinking: this is a vital operation in a vital war industry; for without food nobody could fire a gun; and here we are doing it with a machine that is sixty years old, and no-one in authority thinks that odd. 'Give us the tools and we will finish the job.' That memorable phrase has persistent and ironic echoes to us as we struggle to keep things going with bent nails and bits of string. It came to a point last autumn of an old stocking of Nora's being used to clothe one of the funnels of the drill which leaked and jumped out of place, scattering the seed anywhere. A worn-out silk stocking of gay young dancing days—I remembered certain parties, pre-war fun, watching the ghostly jig that travesty of a girl's leg was doing to the vibration of the coulters over clod3. Oh, give us the tools I thought.

The Hoeing and the Hay

EASTER : the thin green lines of young corn, and in the church spring flowers and candles. Dusk falls outside: candles become the flowers of evening: gusts rattle the old leaded windows and a thrush sings. We have repaired the drill and discarded the stocking, and the lines of the corn are fairly straight. We have painted attempted likenesses of rabbits, cats and chicks on three eggs, with a flourish of foliage; and these the children hunt for on Easter morning. They have never known the ornate profusion of pre-war Easter 'novelties': the hunt for the painted hens' eggs produces as much excitement as we when children ever had, and more. The prospect wakes them up early: us too, being chorused-at before six a.m., 'Is it time to get up?' 'Not yet.' 'Oh bother.'

The wind blows hard, with swift showers: the hedges are all shaken blossom. On Easter Sunday friends gather under our roof after church. The Minister of Agriculture has just broadcast an appeal for volunteers on the land, and has emphasised the seriousness of the food situation. For sugar and potatoes Britain must rely entirely on her own land, and for other foods—meat, milk and bread—on her own resources to a greater degree than ever before. This on the eve of victory in war. *Our* fight, then, is still on. Easter's pause and invocation of other powers nerves and unites us. Here surely is something new in forming, as I remember it; even in war-time farming: the aim being service before profit, such as has always received publicity in speeches; but is now becoming a habit of feeling as well as of talking.

A heifer who would not breed, that I fattened (she was a Red Poll) and sold, brought me in nearly forty pounds. As I took the cheque out of the envelope along with the statement of her killing-out weight and grade from the government centre, I reflected on what would have been my procedure, say, twenty years ago. Then when my heifer was fattened, I had either to send her to the local auction market, where she would have been bought by a ring of butchers, or to haggle with my local butcher for her. In either case it would have cost me a day or half a day, to see that she was not sold too cheaply. Now I know months ahead what she will fetch according to weight and quality. She is put into a truck on the day appointed, and a few days later I received my cheque and statement. What a benefit this piece of government 'interference' in agriculture is to the farmer—to the true farmer (not to the cattle-dealer in farmer's breeches) whose job is *production* and not salesmanship.

What is the hope for the ex-serviceman wishing to take up agriculture? Marketing, marketing, and again marketing. Let the price of every kind of farm produce be assured: let it be known for several months ahead; let it be based on weight and

quality, and the ex-serviceman can have confidence in making a life for himself and his family on the land. All his powers can be concentrated on learning his job of farming, and not on trying to hold his own against a horde of dealers, those vultures of the so-called 'open market'. Oh yes, it was quite an amusing game fencing with them, when you were up to their tricks; but it meant attending market week after week, watching cow after cow, bullock after bullock, pig after pig, sold, in order to keep abreast of the prices. It is the kind of game the good farmer should have no time for. Looking back, I can see that it was the rotten spot in farming: it made farmers into gamblers, so that they could hardly meet anywhere without 'having a deal', or wagering about something if there was nothing to buy and sell. Those wasted hours of 'market day'.

Now I have bought Mr. Merry's cottage, not for a speculation, but to house a farm worker. When the war ends, the Italians will return to Italy: the land-girls to love-in-a-cottage or London, the student to his university, and Walter and I will be left with the farm 'as it was in the beginning'. Not as it was, though, for since then waste acres have been cleared and drained and ploughed, old pastures have become arable fields, and arable fields leys. All of which need more labour, more cultivation, manure and management. Who will inhabit this house, this iniquitous 'tied' house, denounced by workers' representatives?

I like Mr. Merry's house and his garden. Mine and yet not mine. Never mine, except for this afternoon when Nora and I and the children go over it together. All the oldman's chattels are dispersed: his wife has gone to live with a daughter, the floors are scrubbed, the windows closed, the door locked and the key handed to me.

Mine all the apple-trees, blossoming again, mine the bright japonica, the edging of box, the rhubarb and its old enamel-pail

hat; the corner of coppice and the little dell full of primroses, from which once men dug brick earth. And the big oak tree, and underneath it a derelict pair of Mr. Merry's trousers.

Not yours, say the trousers. Only by right of occupancy; and until then still Mr. Merry's.

After dark, by moonlight, surely the trousers get up and totter about the garden, and a stick makes a third leg beside them, raising itself to point occasionally at an apple-tree; and the little dog's perennial bone lying there, follows behind, held in an invisible mouth. Which drops to the ground, and then a tremendous barking is unheard, and it is picked up again. If the cottage remains unoccupied till late summer, then I should expect the passer-by to see an air-poised apple offering itself in the moonlight over the gate.

Already I have had an application for the cottage, but not the sort I expected. I expected someone who would want the cottage for the job, not the job for the cottage. He came with his wife; he was young, but pale-looking through years at an unhealthy urban trade. In a few words I saw the whole family; father, mother, two children, the cramped quarters, the dragging urban fatigue, the desperate desire to burst out into a new life. The sight of the cottage, in a nest of apple-blossom, the dawn of an idea—leave the works and learn the job of the land : wake up every morning to the song of the birds and the sight of the trees.

And I said no. That cottage could not be spared for a learner, but for an experienced cowman or horseman to whom it was imperative to live close to his charges. I shut their dream up in the cupboard again; and I felt almost as bad about it as they.

I have done another bad thing: I have sold Boxer. At least I am made to feel it is bad by Walter, who lives by an instinct of his ancestry. But, I tell him, the country needs milk—babies in London need milk, and we can cultivate with two horses and a

tractor, and keep an extra two cows for what Boxer would consume. But how can a mental picture of babies in London prevail against a horse that *is* really here, was born and bred here?

Year by year the prediction is made that tractors will ruin the land, and year by year my neighbours, with a mixed team of tractors and horses, bring fine crops to harvest. 'That may do for a time,' said the old men, 'but wait, and you'll see.' I have waited, and still I see the good crops. So what? I must believe what I see. In fact I see land a good deal better cultivated than it was twenty years ago.

So ferewell Boxer—welcome Camellia. If I have said things against Boxer I am sorry for them; if I have made pessimistic predictions about Camellia, I take them back. I sold Boxer in the spring and bought Camellia in the summer. She has just calved for the first time and I milked four gallons from her yesterday.

Boxer, the bay gelding, had unaccountable moods. Sometimes, without apparently taking fright, he would walk off smartly with the cart, paying no attention to shouts of 'Woa,' until he had walked it into a gate-post and broken something. At other times he would stand dejectedly like an old cab-horse. He was six years old before he was put into shafts. Said Walter as we lowered the shafts over his back, 'Now look out.' But Boxer stood there like an old cab-horse.

It cost me something in mental sweat to break the news to Walter that Boxer must go. On the morning of the sale I was miserable, not for Boxer, but for Walter. I felt like the perpetrator of some foul crime, and then angry that I should be made to feel like that about my own property. 'Farming is a business like any other,' I protested to myself. But it isn't. I tried to get round, through, or over Walter's quietness on that morning. It was no use. He groomed the horse meticulously, polished the bridle, polished his own boots and leggings. Every thing about him looked funereal: his best coat, hat, leggings and

The Hoeing and the Hay 67boots;. Not once had he said or did he now say, o against my selling Boxer, or that I should regret it. So I knew he felt hopeless about It. He knew horses and he knew men. He knows this man anyhow, and when he gets the bit between his teeth. Over small matters he will argue and argue—about cutting up kale, for instance. Then about some big matter, affecting him deeply, he will not argue at all—just say 'yes.' Master, he knows, has gone 'bull-headed'.

I put a reserve of forty-five guineas on Boxer. When I reached the sale-yard, a bit late (I tried to make myself even a bit too late), I heard that trade was not brisk, so I went to the auctioneer's box and dropped the reserve to forty guineas, having in mind Boxer's old-cab-horse attitude, and not wanting him back. It would be cheap for five guineas not to have to endure another morning like that, another silent polishing of boots and leggings. I looked around at the farmers assembled in the market. Had they, I wondered, had to cut their way through the same air of emotional crisis as I had done to get here—those of them who had horses to sell? They did not look as though they had.

They were interested in a bay horse then being sold—big, bright-eyed, his head rising above the crowd. 'That horse stands well.' The price mounted. 'That's more like a price for a horse.' Down came the hammer at seventy-four guineas. The people parted and he was led out. Then I recognised Boxer. He made the best price that day. Walter had done his duty to the end and recommended him heartily: he may have added some comments on my ignorant strong-headedness in parting with him, which helped to sell him. Boxer was run up the last thirty guineas by two men who both required urgently a horse guaranteed quiet in shafts (it was not long since Walter had cried, 'Now, look out'). Such horses do not come into the ring every day.

Surveying the horse world, I am led to conclude that the last thing anybody will do with a horse is to put it between shafts.

Most of the horses in sales are described as 'gentled', or 'gentled to lead', which is a euphemism that somebody has somehow got a halter over his head without being kicked and trampled on. Of the rest, the majority are described as 'quiet and good worker in chains'. To which may be added 'has been in cart'. Meaning 'was in cart for just so long as it took to kick cart to pieces'. If the cart was not kicked to pieces, the horse has earned the description 'quiet and good worker in all gears'.

These are the few sought after, yet with extreme suspicion, that there must be a catch in it somewhere. And there usually is. Either they are too old, or have some trick such as refusing to back, or if they back, refusing to stop backing.

After Boxer, three colts came swirling into the ring; at which all put up hands, sticks and catalogues, not eagerly bidding but crying protectively, 'Woa!' The horse previous to Boxer, having just been loaded up, was now making a noise like murder in the van.

Walter, holding an empty bridle, was standing with two other men looking at an oil engine in the sale, pretending quite convincingly to be interested in its working. He had come to an old galvanised tank when I joined him. We agreed that Boxer had made a good price. He had been bought, Walter said, to be a van-horse for a local store. There we let the matter drop, and discussed instead the old tank, and its obviously leaky, rusted bottom. We agreed that had it had a bottom, it would have been a good tank; and thought of ingenious ways of giving it one—with a coating of pitch, with a layer of cement—giving the tank a bang every now and then, as though the hollow boom it made proved something good about it.

There are certain things in a sale yard which seem to be there for ever. They are offered periodically in an attempt to reach a reserve placed on them months (or years?) ago. Among these, was a set of gear known as a 'horse-works'. Thereby, before

the advent of other power, a horse by walking in a circle drove a chaff-cutter or root-pulper in the barn. This thing, I think, had ceased even to be offered for sale: but it occurred to me, why should its usefulness even to-day be overlooked ? When you have a horse standing idle in the stable, why start up an oil engine?

Walter found the sight reminiscent, and recalled old names. One he remembered who banged on the wall from inside when he wanted the horse to start or stop; and rattled his stick on the boards when the pace flagged, with immediate effect. But I could not get Walter to view the thing as a proposition for us in our stackyard, and I was disappointed that my offer here to see a use for old horse-power was ignored. He saw it only as a freak of the moment in me, while for him its rust was the past all aglow, the warmth that had gone from around the heart since the end of the horse's sole reign. Perhaps it was tactless of me, who had just sold the horse.

When we three reached home—farmer, man, and empty bridle—we went towards the stable. I had a team of three now: Kitty, Prince and ERT. ERT being the tractor standing in a shed alongside the horses, with just a board-wall between. Two horses look embarrassed with room in a stable that held three yesterday, four some years ago, and before that five. They swing round to see who comes in. We had to go through the tractor shed to reach the stable. Walter laid a hand on the tractor in passing. 'I could learn to work this thing,' he said. Then he went into the harness-room and hung up the bridle.

Red Polls are no good, they tell me: dual-purpose cows, they say, are neither purpose. 'Oh, if you just want something pretty to look at . . .' And yet my heifer that would not breed fetched forty pounds, and Camellia with her first calf gives up to four gallons. I had doubts about Camellia, despite the good milk records of her pedigree. She looked to me too 'bull-

headed'. A cow should have a long, fine, feminine head. Camellia had a short thick one. Her bag, up to within a short time of her calving, seemed almost non-existent.

One day we went to the house of a friend who has a large herd of Red Polls. It was in February. All that week and the week before, John and I and Walter had been hedging. It was a huge tangled hedge on the edge of the derelict lands. It was the culmination of our winter offensive against the lost years. When you have spent a week at hedging of this kind, you are impressed by *the* clearance you have made in so short a time. And then, 'to-morrow,' you say, 'we will burn up all this stuff we have cut down.'

To-morrow. On the third day of burning you realise that cutting the hedge is only half the job—less than half. Burning the stuff is the really hard work; parting it, even. You must get your fire under way. It starts with a deceptive roar and crackle. You think, ah, now we shan't be long; but that is only the sound of the dead leaves on the brambles. By the time you have heaped a great tangle of brushwood on the fire, it has died away: the brushwood arches over the embers, and you have to stand on it to bear it down. And there you stand as on your own funeral pyre, wreathed in smoke, and wondering, didn't those people who burned martyrs at the stake ever have trouble getting their fire started? With the heaven-posessed visionary of a victim crying 'Death where is thy sting?' and only a thin trickle of smoke rising from under his feet, the executioners must have felt a bit sheepish. I know, acting alone on the wild waste lands both the parts of victim and incendiary. If only the darn thing would burn, it can burn me too, I have felt. And there I stood till the flames were spouting all round *my* boots, and jumped on them more to depress the thorny mattress. It was only the imminent ruination of the boots, the last pre-war pair, that finally made me get off.

After a week of this sweating, heaving, lacerating toil (as you

bear a great forkful firewards one or more thorns is always spearing you in the back) I took the family to the home of the friend from whom I had bought *Camellia*. It was business and pleasure combined—to buy two young heifers and attend a birthday party. But the order became reversed for me: the buying of the two heifers was a pleasure; and then I came to the birthday party and found—a bonfire. I was soon hard at work again helping my host to heave forkfuls of bushes on it, to the delight of the children. But there was a sight of a festive table through the big windows, and I worked with enthusiasm. And the bushes weren't so prickly as mine at home, not such ill-bred briars.

When we cleared the first of those derelict fields of ours, young Sammy Handlock came and stood on the newly ploughed land and gazed at the bare expanse. 'There used to be a lovely lot of mushrooms here,' he said, and went home again. Later I heard his grandmother's comment on all our weeks of hedging. 'Now whatever shall we do for blackberries?' Another said, 'That was a good place for a rabbit.'

The 'roughs' as they were called, had a place in the affection of the village. I was not aware of it till I began clearing them. Perhaps the people were not either; it may have been just the conservatism of use. Not that change of any sort is bad, they think, but it may be bad, so be careful. The more progressive spirits saw the good, and rejoiced in it. Others lost something of the poetry of life—perhaps I did too. Nightingales like may bushes, and they sang *in* those thickets in a chorus. Up there I would go, called from hoeing by the message, 'The heifers have broken out of the meadow.' ! would track them through the flowering may, along primrose and violet paths, and places full of orchises.' Oh curse them, where have they got to—oh, how lovely this is. I shouldn't have seen it if they hadn't broken loose, confound them.' Between maledicting the cows and marvelling at the fairyland spring makes of a boggy waste, I

hardly knew whether I was pleased or sorry to be here. Pleased perhaps, if I had had labourers of the kind I remember hoeing for me. As it was, weed-consciousness got the better of nature-delight, and I was glad to chase the heifers back and return to my hoe.

The villagers liked to prowl there, those of the prowling or sauntering sort—the sort of man who walks along by a hedge with his head cocked slightly sideways. The others, of course, were preoccupied with their land, which stood to the credit of the village. (Yes, even the saunterers could not help basking in reflected glory at the sight of Mr. Brisk's beet rows—though they had not spent all Whitsun hoeing, like Brisk and his men.)

There were rabbits, mushrooms, blackberries, crab-apples, wild strawberries. Stray sheep used to find their way there and nibble the sour herbage between the bushes; a certain billy-goat, notorious garden-destroyer, used to find asylum there. There, tame cats turned wild. In October pigs would spend whole days gobbling the acorns shed by the big trees that bordered the place; finishing up their day, on more than one occasion, in Mr. Brisk's sugar beet, for a change of diet. I have heard a story beginning, 'One evening, when I was gone to look for my boar, that had got into the roughs after acorns, and I found him a-eating of Mr. Brisk's sugar-beet—.'

Mr. Brisk, I think, was glad when I fenced and reclaimed some of that wilderness. Burned up, in great bonfires, thorns that in other days would have crackled under many a pot; felled and sawed up and carted away the firewood which people used to go and break and gather in bundles and carry home. This, such as was surplus to my needs, I was now prepared to sell at so much a load, to help pay for the work of the hedging. Thus the romantic wilderness becomes a square ploughed field, and crops are planned, and come up in neat rows, and all is prosaic. But there is another kind of poetry, the kind that inspires Mr.

Brisk to his terrific toils, that makes him such an uncomfortable, such a salutary neighbour.

' O let them be left, wildness and wet,
Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet,'

sang a modern, fairly modern poet. Well, there are plenty of weeds by the hedges, and often too many in the fields. To me, an ordered scene of crops coming into ear, swaying in the sea-wind of Suffolk, interspersed with well-planted woods and flashed hedges, appeals more than all the majesty of the Fells. I do not like a catastrophic landscape. Man in nature, exercising homely wisdom therein, and modifying the scene, imposes a growing order. Not a monotonous one. Nature by herself produces a wilderness like my 'roughs'—thorn bushes and brambles—which is extremely monotonous. A tilled landscape is like an open book, in which you can read not only of nature but of human nature. Pass a man's fields daily and you know that man.

Peace. The VE-days' holiday were two fine days after a week (weeks it seemed) of wet, and even amid the flags and the flares I felt: what an opportunity at last to get at the roots to hoe them, and here the farm is paralysed in sunshine. On the evening of VE-day 2 it rained, and rained half the night, so by Thursday, a working morning at last, it was too wet again to touch the roots. Meanwhile, weeds, weeds, weeds. Friday we made a start, Saturday was a half-day, and Sunday gloriously fine, with the radio promising rain for Monday morning.

On VE-day the shops were open for an hour or two in the morning, and an elated, exalted crowd was busily shopping: husbands with holiday open-neck shirts carrying baskets loaded with bread beside their wives. Bread and flags were the chief commodities. Loaves in the basket carried by holiday-shirted husband; the sun bright on the breadcrust—that looked like victory to me.

A busy day, incidentally, for me, since I' had ordered a hundred day-old chicks which I was to fetch that day. Early milking; then a dash into town for bread, and flags for the children. The Italians asked, 'Please will you buy us two flags?' Then preparing the brooder house for the chicks, then fetching the chicks from the hatchery.

Returning with the bread and the flags at ten o'clock, I hauled Walter out of a ditch he was digging and told him it was a holiday. I gave the children each a flag, which so delighted them that for the first time in their lives they began playing at war. (Anthea has been reading the papers lately.) I heard one of them saying ' . . . and after dinner we'll bomb Berlin.'

And now comes the threat of famine. It is called, more gently, World Food Shortage. So we hoe the beet, and horse-hoe and chop out and single the plants. There are only four acres of them, but a long long job it is, though not an unpleasant one. There is a rhythm to it, as you push and scrape, then pause and aim your hoe, to cut out five of a bunch of six and leave one, the biggest. It would be grand to hoe all day, if there weren't forms to fill in after tea, or letters to answer, just when one is feeling dull and sleepy. Hoeing, one can think and argue with oneself, or with someone else in the spirit. With what emphasis you demolish his point of view with a hack of the hoe at a truculent thistle.

Whitsuntide is hoe-tide: the good farmers and the faithful workers are at it all Saturday, all Monday. And it is not for die double pay, but for the reputation of the farm. I wish the truth could be told about agriculture: I wish it were possible for the nation really to know how the hundred-acre farms are run. For instance, the farm-worker has holidays with pay: he has Bank holidays; Saturday half-day. All this is down in black and white: the public knows it. And yet it is a false picture. The good

farm-worker knows that his master and the farm are desperately short-handed.

I wish the illusion of the tractor being a panacea for all labour shortage could be dispelled. I wish the people could have some idea of how hard the few on the land really do work. Sugar-beet is a crop depending very much on hand labour. It is a crop grown *in addition* to other crops, since roots and kale for cattle are usually grown as well. Yet on the success of the beet crop the whole of our domestic sugar ration depends. Would that the townsman would bring his hoe with him when he goes for an evening's cycle ride in the country, and stop at a field where men are still at work, and say, 'Can I help?' They would soon show him how to chop out and single the plants; and the town would begin to understand the country better.

Sugar-beet and milk are in addition to Suffolk's traditional work of corn. Yet the workers are fewer than ever. On Mr. Brisk's farm I do not think there is a free Saturday afternoon, from seed-time to the lifting of the beet. Yet civilization and machinery should bring some leisure to the small farmer, not cause him to slave harder than his ancestors, which is the bare present truth. Such present conditions will denude the countryside still further, for only one youth in a hundred will turn to the land. Every morning there is an exodus of our village boys to the town: they go cycling past as we put out the milk, shouting and singing. There they work as errand boys: the village is their dormitory.

I hoe all Whitsun. The land-girl has gone to town in her best clothes. She has a wonderful green trousers suit in which she looks stunning. I take off my shirt and hoe in my vest. I do a row in half an hour: I reckon how many rows I shall have done by sunset, and at tea-time I am well up to schedule. Nora has gone to Anthea's school sports, a pleasure I have had to deny myself this year, because weeds worry me. But this work is to me a sort of pleasure: it will stand the test of another modern

poet: 'If work doesn't absorb you as a child is absorbed in play *don't do it.*'⁹ It does, and the being alone in a wide field in the sun, alone with all the young crops of my farm, while the rest of the world is on holiday.

The young must make holiday, and so they should. But a farm needs also the ballast of the married worker, with family. With settled, creative, stay-at-home interests. Such, save for Walter, mine has not. There is a weather-anxiety towards Saturday and holiday-times, a will-it-be-fine, will-it-be-hay-carting? look. This nervous 'Can I make that date? Another load and I shall be late for him and the cinema,' does have an effect on master's nerves, who steels his heart and says 'Another load.' Sometimes I am milking, and the door opens and the question is put—young man's or woman's, never Walter's—'Shall we unload this load?' 'Yes,' I growl, 'and get another.' I can almost feel a wave of cold flow in before the door is closed again.

But Walter, he would go on loading and unloading till it was too dark to see. Many a time, after late milking, we have gone out alone together to fetch in a last load. And a sort of blessedness falls on our work to compensate for hunger and fatigue. The countryside in the sinking sun and the coolness, combined with a diminution in urgency, makes Walter reminiscent and me well-pleased to listen. He must wonder at me being such an appreciative listener at times and such an impatient one at others. Walter never winds up and never winds down—he goes on at the same pace and pressure through the day and through the year.

His comment, implicit or explicit, on my early morning impatience is 'There's time enough for that yet.' Whereas at sundown, when even I consider it time to knock off, he will want to go on and on.

Farm Sunday: last year I broadcast a Postscript: this year I preached in our village pulpit. But alas, I can't live up to my

preaching, and gave John a wiggling for chopping out the beet and leaving all the weeds, and made a sermon of that, till the weeds became, in spite of myself, a monstrous iniquity. The hoeing has acted as a depressant on him, who is good at mechanical adjustments, he finding it monotonous and elementary, simply because he was doing it soullessly, with an infra-dig feeling: he couldn't feel the art in it, couldn't see the *dance* of his hoe. Oh, the dance of the dull manual job. He complained of the monotony. 'When you're my age,' I told him, 'you'll be thankful for a long monotonous job—why, it's a holiday.' He didn't see that.

More hoeing crops, more muck: that is the secret of better farming. And more labour.

Perhaps one day I'll be able to live up to my sermons, too. What a millenium. As it was, the weeds depressed me. The Italians, Carlo and Toni, said 'The boss look bad—he feel ill, similar last month.' But John said (having had his wiggling), 'No—boss look bad because of bad job hoeing, much weeds still.' Carlo and Toni think I blame them too; and Toni with much gesticulation cries, 'When I chop out beet I cut grass (i.e. weeds): I say to John, "you chop beet but not cut grass, you must bend your back." John say, "You mind your business." I can say nothing. See, boss, I know job of beet: I hoe much similar in my country. I teach Carlo. I say chop beet, cut grass—so—(with a push of the hoe)—and so—(with a pull and scrape). If you disunsatisfied with us, you tell.'

I assured the little man that I never held either him or Carlo to blame, but knew it was John because (luckily) he did a number of short rows by himself and they showed up. So then I knew whose was every fourth row on the rest of the field, which showed green. I reminded Toni and Carlo that I had watched them hoeing the first day and said 'Good.' I hope they took in my explanation.

When I first protested at the way John held **his** hoe (rather

like a long finger holding a pen), he said it was 'Wiltshire fashion.' 'I'd rather you do it Suffolk fashion,' I replied. Now he bends his back.

Half-education is no good. The mind becomes a cinema-clam. Half-education just wakens the mind sufficiently to make a man feel alone in a field. Technical training is no good without a humane education, one that is not concerned with making a living, but making you live. Only a humane education can civilise the tractor, and civilise the factory, which goes with it. The tractor, in its way, is as primitive an object as a flint axe. If there is to be an age of machines, then this is just the first clumsy prototype. Man could have done much better already than that barbarous noise and unwieldiness, had he really concentrated his effort on it. But agriculture has been too poor to pay for refinements.

Efficiency: but nature herself is not particularly concerned with efficiency, except in the devilish accuracy with which some insects sting their victims—not to death, but to paralysis, so that they are a preserved meat for the grubs when their eggs hatch out. And man is part of nature. Is man *naturally* concerned with efficiency? He is more concerned, I think, with glory, from the self-glorification of a cockerel on a dung-heap to the glorification of God in heaven.

But to-day, we must be concerned with efficiency in farming, even to the point of making it an ethic, simply for the fact that there are so many people in the world to feed; a largely devastated world, a largely office-working world. If we are not going to make sheer efficiency an ethic, then something must be done about the control of populations. Or our wild places will all be ploughed up, and our best thought engrossed in how to produce food from the summit of Ben Nevis. This is an ethical question, which so far seems to have escaped the notice of the churches—either a national policy of birth-regulation, or of plough-up

and mechanised overtime. Mechanised? Because a horse eats growth of the soil while a tractor works on a source of power that takes up no field-space: the oats and the hay can be fed to cattle.

The hay crop is good this year. The mower has been overhauled and goes well. On Saturday we cocked some clover hay beside the beet-land, and Nora brought tea and had a picnic with the children. The sky looked thundery, and we worked hard to finish before it should rain. Nora kept prophesying that it would not. A few drops fell as the last cocks were built to 'Maria Marie' sung in harmony by Toni and Carlo. They went home, Walter went to milking, and I flopped down under a hay cock, alone with the family in our field of work done. Consumed tea and fruit cake, stared at the sky which was blowing brighter, as Nora had foretold, and then at the flickering leaves of the thriving young mangolds and sugar-beet. Farming is a business of limited and urgent targets, which one reaches (or not) by Saturday evening. These five acres of hay cocks were ours this week, by the luck of the weather. The day before, at mid-day, Walter and I debated whether or not to turn the swathes. He looked at them after dinner: I had already brought forks, rakes and the men to the field. He thought it would do no good to turn it yet—certainly not if it rained, rather the reverse. But I thought, if it doesn't rain and we turn it now, we shall be able to cock it to-morrow afternoon, and my Sunday will be free of cloud-anxieties. It looked very dark just as we had finished turning it, and I heard that there was a heavy storm of rain near at hand. By luck we had none, so my decision was justified and we cocked on Saturday afternoon.

And there we sat, the job done, justified for once in trusting the weather. It was one of those moments when one can look on the farm as an achievement (so far) and not as a job crying out to be done. But soon we fell to appraising the hay cocks, saw a tottery one here and one whose top had been blown off

there, and were impelled to begin putting them right. That, of course, is a job to which there is no end—the mending of hay cocks; and there comes a time when you have to refuse to look any more; and walk straight towards the gate, interfering with those only that lie directly in your path. Then we all went up to the bean-field, and picked a basket of young beans to cook, pods and all, as a vegetable. Anthea said she loved the farm very much: Martin had been rather impatient the last hour or so (ever since tea had been eaten) to do something different and be somewhere else, he didn't know what or where. The beans proved just the thing, and the children disappeared into them and became voices in a sea of green, calling to one another, now here, now there. I felt even felonious, helping steal my own young beans for a tasty dish, that should grow and ripen for cattle.

Now we have cocked half the clover field. It rained a deluge on Monday evening, but this morning I found the cocks we made last Saturday perfectly dry. The second lot of cocks were standing up in dense rows of dark domes, when a friend came over the farm with me after tea to-day. He admired the clover crop, and called it the foundation of the restoration of this land.

Two men were loading a huge plough upon a lorry that was nearly too narrow for it. I wrote to the Committee, please plough the headlands of my field which you cleared of bushes under contract, because that part is still full of roots. I said to the driver of the big deisel tractor which pulled the plough, 'I didn't want to break my little plough on one of those roots.' 'Why, there's nothing here to hurt,' he exclaimed; then broke that monstrous thing.

The parson called this evening and spoke of a service for Lammas—of a loaf that Nora should make of our own wheaten flour, to be offered in the church, and asked me to give an address, and—'Oh, if we could get someone who can play the flute and one the fiddle—.'

Two things Sylvia has learned at school. 'Mummy, I can say Our Father. Shall I say it to you now?'

Mummy (at the sink, looking for slugs in lettuces), 'Wait dear, till we get upstairs, and say it to me then.'

'Then I'll show you how I can skip.'

And she puts on her shoes, the ones that haven't slippery soles, and stands in the yard with her skipping rope ready. Then she whirls it over her head and it cuts the ground from under her feet.

It is a milestone in life when your daughter learns to skip and your son to tie his own tie (and put on his own shirt, even though sometimes back to front, which makes him angry with the whole world till after breakfast).

To-day on her rounds our woman vet. inseminated twenty cows, and she budded twenty roses for us in the evening. On a crab-apple stump in the hedge Walter has grafted several shoots from the orchard, and all have taken. At supper the subject arose of what made moss so immortally and intensely mossy to our childhood view, and every stone as individual as a thing alive. Art puts a frame round a thing and lets you see it in its mysterious actuality. That is all. It shows you life—a hazel nut or the Resurrection—as it really is. Yes, the hoe dances; and the body is wedded to its work by rhythm.

At the Suffolk Show, the first to be held since before the war, it rained. There were no booths, no agricultural merchants' paste-board pavilions or implement shows; but simply lines of horses and cattle, each after its kind, tethered to posts in the ground. There were a few judging rings made of ropes. The whole was under a great canopy of full-leaved, gusty trees. It was a glorious sight; the sheer animal virtue of English farming life, seen under green, upon green, against green; the colour of Suffolk horses and Red Poll cows, chestnut and rich red-brown.

And the whole Empire was represented there: there were Indians, Africans, Canadians in battledress; besides Americans and men of other nations. Gurkhas gazed at Red Polls while their English officer chatted to them of what they saw. I saw him amid his Gurkhas in front of Suffolk horses, sheep, pigs, interpreting England. It is a sight I like to remember, especially when listening to the mud-slinging of party politics resurgent on the radio just now.

Hay-making goes more cheerfully when four or five of us gather round the wagon, rather than when we go in pairs with two vehicles. And I think we get on just as fast. There are two on the wagon to load, and three with really long forks to pitch it up, one of whom jumps upon the tractor as the last forkfuls go up, shouts 'Hold tight,' and drives forward slowly to the next pair of cocks.

Prince, I am sorry to say, still rears up on his hind legs at the rustle of hay behind him. Kitty by herself could not pull such a load as we can build; and the result, regrettable or not, is that the iron horse pulls our hay-wain, while the two living ones decorate the pasture. There is not time to train Prince to it in the precious hours of hay-carting weather. There never does seem time to train that horse properly. Just when he is getting used to the job of muck-carting, the job finishes, there is no more muck to cart, and then he grows strange to the cart again. We took him to cart mangolds. They bounced into the cart with thuds, and he tried to bounce out of it, and would have bolted if we had not been unnaturally nimble.

In farming, you are concentrating all the time on getting the job done. In the past, it seems, they enjoyed the horse for his own fine sake, even in the process of forming, as now we enjoy him for his own sake at the Suffolk Show. At the sight of those magnificent animals ranged under the trees, I said to myself 'There is nothing to compare with horses on the land/ and

allowed my emotions free rein as the old horse-ploughmen expatiated on their behalf. 'I must have a stableful' I think, as photographs come out of the breast pocket or album, showing now-old men standing in their prime at the heads of their ploughing teams, and hear the history of those horses, including their amusing peculiarities when young, such as refusing to pull an empty cart, or rearing up in traces—amusing enough to hear about at leisure on show-day, but exasperating at the time, surely, with urgent work to be done. Such tales I shall recount of Prince in mellower days; his playful snappings at one's sleeve, his dashing out of shafts to the destruction of the horse-yard gate, his pulling sheaves out of the corner of the stack at harvest time, and so on.

But there is a beauty in expediency too. A beauty in the neat doing of a thing as much as in the sight of the means to it. No one enjoys a horse more than I do, for his exuberant action in his free gallop across the pasture, or nodding forward at plough. A tractor in motion means simply nothing; but my tractor pulling an enormous load of hay over rough ground so steadily it hardly shakes it, and bringing it close beside the stack, and standing there quite still, and not trying to chew the corner of the stack—that pleases me.

The hay I am making now will go to produce a greater proportion of beef than ever before. Less than ever before will go in horse-energy. It is all expressed in our modern version of 'The Hay Wain'. It is a wain all right, almost old enough to be the one that Constable painted. It is long and high and boat-shaped; blue and red and decorated. But it is pulled by the lean-gutted tractor. The exhaust pipe sticks up like a long narrow funnel. The whole outfit, with men sitting in the wagon riding out to the field, looks like an early-Victorian version of the railway train; far, far from modern.

Our stack, which started on a base of ten yards by five, has expanded in all directions. It is a massive square, the produce

of only six acres on which the clover cocks stood as thick as 'warts on a hog's back'. I think with satisfaction, comparing the two, of that year when the leys failed, and Walter and I had to niddle about gathering hay from a neighbour's poultry pens, and cutting odd-shaped little paddocks of poor, parched herbage. Even then, only a little stack resulted. And now all this from six acres. No stack, no stock. No stock, no stack.

When one considers the number of times each forkful of hay must be handled, the wonder is that that field of growing clover has been converted into this fragrant block of stuff so soon. Our gang has worked well: I have never made hay with such a mixed one; Walter, John the professor's son, and two Italians. Medieval England, the Laboratory, and Campo Basso.

After weeks of uncertain skies, there comes a sudden blaze of sunshine, and for the last three days work has proceeded without one eye on the weather. There have been summers when one has hardly dared to leave the stack uncovered while going for another load, and faith has been hard put to it to break out a few more rows of cocks for carting.

Handling hay is the driest work of all. Even the miserable war-time beer which I brought in a stone bottle was appreciated. Medieval England recalled his former home-brewed. The Laboratory drinks milk. Campo Basso spoke of vineyards. 'We hear from home; the grape harvest is good.' Wine is the elan of their agriculture, as home-brewed was of ours. Milk makes muscle, as the Laboratory proves, but beer, I think, has a broader smile. The brain power that has invented the machines of modern farming did not, I think, derive from home-brewed beer. He who imbibed that in the heat of former harvests, would not have thought of any means of mitigating such thirst and its assuagement. Milk, though, might make a man inventive.

The Laboratory speaks of grass-drying, of cut-lift outfits, of pick-up balers, or hay-sweeps and hoists. The modern scientific

view seems to be—'If you *must* make hay, make it this easy way, but better make silage or dried grass.' Sometimes I think this or that machine would be profitable to have. A pick-up baler began to fill my vision. This machine is drawn along the wind-rows and gathers up the hay as it goes, compresses it into square bales and leaves them ready to be carried home and stored in half the space that is needed by a stack. But then I hear from a friend who owns one, that you have to be very careful or your bales of hay go mouldy in the middle. So it seems I might be swapping one worry for another. The small farmer cannot afford to adopt unproven techniques. Two hundred pounds for a pick-up baler might or might not be justified. But the two hundred pounds would be gone in any case. And there would be the anxiety of leaving the hay uncocked even for a night, when it is so far made that rain would ruin it, so that the pick-up baler can work along the rows. Nor does the hay-sweep do away with carting your hay. You must still cart it home from the field in which it was stacked, admittedly in a compressed form and in your own good time.

Nevertheless, I like to listen to the ingenious Laboratory mind. For after all, the corn-drill, the reaper-binder and grass-cutter, have been invented, derided, proven and absorbed into agriculture. Walter listens too—or rather I should say he hears. The Italians express understanding of something simplified into pidgin English for their benefit, but their minds are more on wine, oil and macaroni. There is not the common ground of reminiscence that our old farm-hands had, who are dead, God rest them. Walter remembers a wicked pony that 'came at you with his mouth open' decades back, but there is no shared recollection of places and people to garnish the anecdote. But what we lack in folk memory, we make up in variety. We piece together Toni's broken English and gain an idea of his farm in Campo Basso. His fork trying to conjure in air a meaning he has no word to express, inscribes Italia across the Suffolk landscape.

His own farm there is powered by a crawler tractor and four oxen. He says the ox-plough makes 'very nice job,' though it is slow. The incongruity of tractor and oxen does not worry the Italian.

Yesterday evening three of us sat under my pear-tree, two of us farmers and the other a ploughing contractor, ex-farmer; and one said how he had enjoyed earthing up potatoes with a single horse and plough. The contractor mentioned that in the course of his work he had seen a man ploughing with horses and had asked if he might take the plough once up and down the field, just to recapture the feeling of it. Yet neither of these men were romantics, but practical men depending on the land for their living. Nor had they any illusions as to the possibility of an all-horse farm to-day. Perhaps when the tractor is neater, Jess noisy and smelly, the farmer will take more pride in it. The Englishman is fundamentally such an artist that he must have a thrill of fineness in his work to be satisfied. That is why we have lagged behind the Americans in mass-production, but there is still nothing to compare with the Rolls-Royce engine.

In Italy a crawler tractor might adorn the background of a Nativity picture. There is no time sense. The old home-baking and wine-press continue. Electricity lights up the old house-wifely arts. Toni has but one horse, and from the way his fists pound the air there is no doubt it is not used for pulling a plough, but for trotting to market. Eggs are taken to market after church on Sunday. Wine for breakfast, coffee only on waking. Tea a mystery. Wine makes even of threshing a fiesta. You do not have to beg a man here, a man there. Everybody comes, and there is wine all day. 'Too much wine,' says Toni. 'Too much' is just his idiom for plenty. Wine and the Latin temperament can produce Ceres even out of a threshing machine.

How Suffolk used to suspect the 'foreigner'. A 'foreigner' might have emigrated only from the next county. Now, with

The Hoeing and the Hay 87 Americans white and blacky Italians, and German the idea of foreignness is swamped.

An odd outcome of the war of two continents, is our little party at tea under the haystack.

Walter comes to me; I am in the yard preparing to fetch in the cows. He surveys his stack-building from a distance. It satisfies him. 'I don't care what anybody says,' he thunders, 'you can't make good hay without labour.' He looks at me sternly, lest I should have been tempted to dally with labour-saving expedients recommended in our stack-building conversation.

'These sweeps—huh! They sweep up everything—old scythe blades, bits of wire and tin, horses' shoes. I believe they're the reason so many stacks fly a-fire.' I was puzzled: scythe-blade striking sparks from tin? 'They tear up green and all from the bottom, and make the stack heat.'

As a matter of fact farming as reflected in farming journals is quite a different thing from that which you actually see as you travel through the countryside. In a journey across Suffolk I saw only one hay-sweep; everywhere it was horses and the old farm wagons.

The wheels of my wagon were shod with strakes. These are curved segments of iron nailed on to the wheel-rim, an ancient method of 'tyring'. Last harvest the strakes began to give way. I had the wheels re-shod afterwards—not with strakes but with whole hooped iron tyres. That cost me fourteen pounds. But my very ancient wagon will now carry as great a load of hay as a new tractor-trailer costing seventy pounds. Walter regretted the loss of the strakes. When the wheels were returned with whole tyres, they had lost their old virtue for him.

We lop our trees to let our great loads pass under; mountains of moving hay, creeping homeward, with Toni very small on top. We can only get six or eight of these loads in a day. There is no machine to do this muscular thinking for us, to poise and pivot as the body and lift up a mountain of hay little by little

on the leverage of an ash-wood fork stick. To load it also so that it will stay there. Then to undo all that and re-build it on the stack. The doing and undoing, the building and unbuilding—a tall straight load is the pride of a man for a quarter of an hour ; then it melts, is forgotten, and the man is sitting in an empty wagon bowling back to the field.

Formerly that wagon knew only harvest use: for the rest of the year it stood in the back of the cart-lodge, collecting debris. Now it is wedded to the tractor, and has fetched loads of kale in the snow, and loads of straw into the yards regularly through the winter. Both end-boards take out, leaving just wooden stay-bars, so it is easy to load heavy and bulky things, such as crab-harrows, and draw them out to the field. This ability to fetch gangs of harrows quickly from one end of the farm to the other is a blessing in the busy days of seed-time.

And yet—and yet, this wagon is more than a convenience. For the last year—ever since I had the draw-bar made to replace the shafts—I have lived with this old farm carriage, been climbing in and out of it, coupling it and uncoupling it. While I cultivate, it stands waiting by the gateway.

You may not be a judge of art, but if you hang a picture on your wall, you will know in a little whether it is a true picture or not. No mere surface facility can prevail against the daily contact. If it is good, it grows upon you: it lives in your eyes. If not, it becomes as though the wall on which it hangs were bare.

This old wagon has grown on me, has somehow grafted itself to my life. Its curve, its chamfered decorations and its symmetry—whatever the impulse that prompted the decorations, whether to lessen weight or solely for 'finish', the effect is of something more than prettiness. Its essential grace has grown on me in daily use. This despite its ponderous under-structure. I shall feel a loss when it is worn out. I want to preserve it: it is personal: I cannot procure it again, like a factory-made trac-

tor. Yet if I preserve it, I lose it. To see it as in a museum is nothing. To use it is the only way to enjoy it.

This wagon is a whole culture that has passed away. Yet handle it, set it in motion, and it breathes. It is lost—lost by us—but it lives in some hidden sense. Like a certain picture of hay-making on my wall—little dabs of paint are white shirts, busy arms. Oh the haste of that little grouping, while a storm-cloud looms up and its gust blows the willows bright. It might be my wagon they are loading, while the two horses stand, rather restlessly, and one of the load-builders reaches down from the great cloud of green hay to take another forkful which is being lifted up. There are women with rakes: the labour of the people is like the blowing of the wind, urgent, harmonious; centred about two great clouds—of hay and storm.

When Walter cries out 'You can't make hay without labour,' he speaks that picture; its power is the passion of his voice. The fragrant swath and the storm-cloud are still with us: to be allowed to re-enact that annual emergency, to tread that ancient measure, is what he desires most to do on a day in June. It is, in fact, his holy-day. My picture explains my man.

7

Clean Fields and Foul Gardens

W HEN I went into my cowshed, well pleased with our achievement with the hay, and sat down to milk Camellia, I had a shock. One side of her udder was hot, swollen and hard. 'Mastitis'—the dread word flashed before my eyes and quenched my joy in the hay. I mentioned the symptoms to a friend who has considerable veterinary experience of cows. 'That's mastitis all right,' he said, 'it comes to us all sooner or later—mostly sooner.' 'What's to be done?' 'Milk her separately—

use a fresh udder cloth, wash your hands in disinfectant before and after, strip the affected quarter hourly—dose daily with sulphanilamide, and you *may* keep it from spreading through the rest of the herd.'

I said to Walter, who milked her in the morning, 'Did you notice Camellia's bag?'¹ 'Yes, I reckon she's been stung by a bee,' he said; 'it'll be better to-morrow.' It was.

Scythes still swing through the summer days. Some are mowing railway banks, some field verges. The hot days come, and daily you hear the whip of the scythe-stone in the dawn, and presently you see a load of flowering vetches being carted home to the cows.

In Suffolk we produce as much milk per cow as the lush west, according to official figures, but not with grass. Our fodder crops are our stand-by. Pastures provide a resting-place and medicinal weeds. 'The milk's shrinking,' is the slogan of late June. He who had three churns at his gate has only two, he who had two has only one. I now have only one, but that is because I do not choose to send all my milk away in summer. Buttercup is suckling two young bullock calves—born in March, they will make some Christmas dinners one day. I'd rather lose kudos and make beef; for, yes, you do lose kudos. You pass a neighbour's single churn and say to yourself, 'H'm, he's not getting much milk, then, from his ten cows'; and no doubt passers-by say the same thing of me. Worse still, they look at my well-fed Red Poll herd in the meadow and confirm their poor opinion of Red Polls as milkers. It is so unusual to let calves feed as nature intended. But I do not believe you can get good stock on skim milk and cream substitute, or on no milk at all. I have proved it in the comparative growth of calves fed on the cow and on the bucket. Is not this one reason for the disease in our dairy herds to-day? The foundation of a good constitution has not been laid young.

And now the nation wants beef as well as milk. It shall have

it, as far as I can provide it. Nothing gives me more pleasure than a valid reason to keep a bull calf. I hate to see the little things at a few days old herded wretchedly together in market pens. I like to see them in a well-strawed loose-box sucking mother or foster-mother, two on a cow. Presently they begin to nibble at slices of mangold powdered with bran, and at hay. There is pleasure in providing good food for good stock, and seeing them grow: it is as good as having a good dinner yourself. Nor can you forget, if you are an arable farmer, the good of their manure for the land.

I looked at the mangolds and sugar-beet of a friend who before the war kept five hundred pigs. It is the best crop of roots I have seen this year. 'How much fertiliser did you give it?' I asked, knowing he had kept no pigs since 1940. 'None,' he replied. 'To the previous barley crop then?' 'Nothing. I've been caning this land,' he confessed. Just then some small pigs came straggling through a gateway, the hope of that land again. 'Your land can stand caning—it's got something under it; to cane some land would be merely flogging a dead horse,' I replied.

Another friend's crop of roots looked well. He had fed his land with eight hundredweight per acre of compound chemical fertiliser this spring. But the crop did not look quite so well as that on land which had had nothing, but pig muck five years ago.

Thank heaven the war is over and some farmers may be able to keep pigs again. I like to have every yard and pen full of stock in winter, and a rising tide of muck under clean straw.

Scythes swing in orchards, in graveyards; cottagers snick the grass from banks and narrow paths in their gardens with skilful movements, wielding some favourite ancient blade. Banks and borders lack the perfect tool to shave them, till an electric hand-clipper is invented (why have our electricians been so slow at invention?). But the countryman does wonders with an old scythe.

Labour, everywhere labour in the sun; mowing fodder,

making hay-cocks, pitching and loading, unloading and stacking. The amount of machine-sitting is very small in the farm-worker's varied year, after half a century of mechanisation. Variety is the salt of man's life, and of the life of the soil. As long as we stick to variety we have nothing to fear from mechanisation. The machine, serving us, yet remains impotent to impose its pattern on us.

My friend, with two hundred acres, said 'I've the outlook of a small-holder,' to another man who was farming whole farms as single fields. Yes, you can be a small-holder on two hundred acres as on twenty. My friend's farm is as various as a garden. He grows runner-beans, peas for the table, onions for seed (a handsome crop they are, in flower), rows of corn-flowers for seed. No tractor can cope with the cleaning of them, only hands and the horse. Even a row-crop tractor has not sufficient clearance. When he hoes the onion rows he uses ropes bound with bags to avoid chafing the horse's flanks, instead of chains and a whippetree. The whippetree would damage the plants.

The beauty of farming is that you never go a journey but you gather a new thought from something you have seen, and bring it home with you. One is being continually re-born into the life of the land. After the county show, or just a walk over a good farm, one starts again with a new resolve.

When I saw that my friend, not content with the roses in his garden, had trained some up his stable wall; and not content with the lawn before his house, had mown also the verge between the road and his buildings, I was refreshed. Watching the hay climbing the elevator in his stackyard, and thinking of the crops I had seen—the peas, runner-beans, onions and corn-flowers, as well as the barley and sugar-beet, it seemed that he had removed the rigid boundary between farm and garden. Actually he had dug out a huge overgrown garden hedge and substituted posts with a single length of chain. You saw house, garden and fields in one glance. The point of this is that my

friend is a successful farmer, and makes as much profit per acre as any man. Diversity pays, as he manages it—corn and flowers and vegetables. I should guess his farm returns more per acre than the alternate sugar-beet and barley in huge blocks, which is another form of modern farming, with its liability to disease. His farm is founded on pigs (like the fertility of the cottage garden); the other on yearly and increasing doses of chemical fertiliser.

I have no case against synthetic fertiliser, but every time I look at a bag of that stuff the words 'No residual values' pass through my head. I remember a farmers'-club meeting: the subject of the discussion was manure: there was a panel of speakers, among them a representative of a firm of fertiliser manufacturers. All were agreed (the expert representative included) that however heavy a dressing of fertiliser you give your crop, there are no residual values, and you have to give an equal dressing next year to obtain an equal result. Nobody seemed to know quite where the unused fertiliser went to, whether it was washed away by winter rains or became 'fixed' in the soil—in any case it was unavailable beyond the year in which it was sown.

The big hall was packed with farmers of every degree, from small-holders to thousand-acre men. After some American films demonstrating various methods of fertiliser application, the discussion proceeded. Superphosphate, potash, sulphate of ammonia—it was important to know which of them best suited the various crops, and in what combinations. Now that fertilisers were rationed, it was necessary to use them to the best advantage. The small amount of potash allocated must be saved for the root crop.

Then some farmer rose and said, in broad, husky Suffolk speech, 'To my thinking there's nothing like a good coat of muck.' Whereupon the audience applauded vigorously. 'Where are the muck heaps we used to see?' he added passion-

ately. 'Where are the great dungks that did your heart good to see?' He opened his mouth again, but after a moment closed it and sat down.

Now the farmers' meeting became a paean to muck. First one, then another rose and said, 'Muck is the father of money.'¹ 'You can see the effect of a good coat of muck for years afterwards.' 'Muck stays by the soil.' 'Muck is the sheet-anchor of farming.'

At every mention of the word, there were rumbles of assent. 'Hear, hear.' 'Yes, yes.' The cool reasoning of our former discussion was swept away by a rising tide of emotion. Muck was these *men's* religion: the word produced a thrill as they barked it out, the radio-active little monosyllable.

This feeling infected the panel of speakers. One after another, they stood up and affirmed their faith in muck. The only person who kept cool was the representative of the firm of fertiliser manufacturers. He said nothing for awhile: his pleasant, clean-shaven face regarded the assembly with a quiet smile, as the wave of affirmation went over. Finally, judging his moment, he rose and 'reminded' us that valuable as farmyard manure undoubtedly was for the working of the soil, it was chemically not a complete fertiliser; *in* fact it was often excessive in nitrogen and deficient in phosphate. Fertilisers were needed as well. He quietly rapped us all over the knuckles for our rather unseemly outburst, by his cool statistical tone. He did his best to damp down our ardour by strings of comparative figures. The lay mind quickly wilts under these: it is like putting a hen's beak upon a chalked line. The man's technique was flawless: he had obviously dealt with muck-enthusiasm before.

From his remark that fertilisers were needed in addition to muck, he went on (after a cry of 'What about residual values?') to demonstrate that the cost of carting a *ton* of phosphate in the form of muck was wildly extravagant compared to the cost of applying it in the form of chemical powder. He left us with the

conclusion that the making of muck is the most uneconomic job on the farm. This was developed from his former contention that fertilisers could be profitably employed in alliance with muck. The making of muck, we were left to infer, was a waste of time, compared, say, to the ploughing in of a green crop for humus. But, 'What about residual values?' the voice still demanded, showing that we were not subdued.

And whenever I look at bags of that stuff in my barn, I repeat to myself, 'No residual values.' If it is indeed cheaper than muck, how costly muck must be.

The rye-grass and clover we have just carted was fathered by muck: we spread a good coating over it last autumn, and it had all disintegrated into the sod by the spring. We had a heavy crop, and I guarantee there will be some residual values.

Now we have out the Long Meadow, Why don't farmers cut their hay earlier? ask the experts. I should like to assure them that the answer is not ignorance on the farmer's part. He is as anxious to get to his hay as the expert would have him be; but the grass-land expert, unlike the farmer, has not several acres of sugar-beet to contend with first, not to speak of mangolds and kale. That belongs to another department of the research station. But on the farm the same labour has to deal with both, and inadequate labour. I only wish I *could* get to my hay in May!

As it is, after being twice hoed (by hand twice, by horse twice) the roots are growing foul again while we are dealing with the hay. You have a nice comfortable picture of a clean, thriving root crop, as you last left it. You go back to that field after haysel and——oh, heavens !

My wife said, arising suddenly beside me out of tall pea rows, ' Gardening is not making things grow: it is trying to stop things growing.' And she carried a sheaf of sow-thistles to the rubbish heap. This remark opened my eyes to the fact that the garden was knee-high in weeds. I passed through the

garden daily on my way to the fields, was worried by weeds in the roots which the cows would eat, but had hardly noticed weeds among the peas, beans, brussels sprouts which we should eat. This was wrong: I hate the disregard of all garden grace and neatness which a number of farmers show. Not slovenly farmers, by any means; but men whose fields are clean and their boundaries trim. But at the garden hedge all this ends; and there chaos, or near-chaos, reigns. If they should dig, or have dug, a small patch of ground for vegetables, it is done at the latest possible moment, when they would have considered it disgraceful to be ploughing a last-year's stubble for barley. The war is not to blame for this; they were just as bad before the war. Yet the labourer still tends his garden, despite long hours of overtime in the fields.

I found I was growing the same habit of mind. ' You don't get your living from the garden, ' is the farmer's stock excuse for a square patch of jungle under his windows. If you go with an archaeologist's eye and rummage about in it, you will find traces of a former civilisation there. You will find evidence that it was once planned, orderly, and productive; a centre of old family life. Of course, you *do* get your living from the garden—all that living which is inexpressible in terms of cash.

The large farmer affords a man to keep his garden: the farm worker affords his own muscle after the day's work is done. But many a hundred-acre man in his sheer zeal for his fields, affords neither himself nor a man.

So—a little bit of oneself becomes a jungle.

Soon I was labouring beside Nora. For every weed I pulled up here, there would be one left among the roots. Never mind; we must have our garden tidy; she must, so I must.

All to-day I have been labouring in my garden. (Admittedly it is too damp to horse-hoe the roots: but even if it were not . . .) It is a work of redemption. And what fun it has been—and much harder work than farming! I think, as I sweat.

perhaps this is why farmers dislike gardening. After all, a horse pulls your cart, but you must push your wheelbarrow yourself. For the gardener, there is a small implement like a horse-hoe, with a wheel; but *he* has to shove it along.

I have not lacked entertainment. Martin and Sylvia have been engaged in a building enterprise, erecting a School for Rosemary and Toby' (their make-believe selves, I think), from a heap of old bricks in the corner.

'That looks like the school chapel you're building,' I say to Martin.

'It's not; it's Rosemary's bed.'

I had got the scale of it wrong: what I thought were the precincts are a dormitory.

'That's lucky,' I hear Sylvia say. 'I've just found a bit of old paper for her pillow.'

The scholars are unripe plums stuck on sticks, nodding most sleepily over desks of half-bricks covered with sand, with a green leaf each for exercise book.

Then Anthea comes back from school, and the three of them pick strawberries, and climb on top of the wood-pile to eat them. They fling the stalks on the ground, and the chicks rush at them expectantly, and are given bad conduct marks for greed; the 'school' being now transferred to the chicken-run. They are given good marks for perching prettily, and other imputed virtues. At length I hear Nora calling the children and tell them, 'Mummy's calling, children; it's bedtime.' They climb down from the pile of wood, saying, 'We *have* had a lovely time.'

So Has father, observing results so far. The paths round the vegetable beds, which stretched green beards of grass across the earth, are shaven, and a foot of ground is recovered all round them. Much niggling with a short-bladed scythe, reap-hook and finally mowing machine, accomplished this. Then the beds must be weeded, and the rubbish forked off. Finally plants of kale and

cabbage and sprouts planted out, which are growing spindly through overcrowding in the seed-bed. I will get those plants planted out to-night, I tell myself.

Nora comes and pulls carrot-thinnings to be eaten with a cheese dish for supper. The crop promises beautifully, the miniature roots tailing straight and deep into the ground. They emphasise the importance of this hand-husbandry to us. 'I will plant those . . .' A car slows up near the gate. My eyes will it on; but it won't. There is a crunch of footsteps on the drive. I make my body express extreme industry and absorption. A dark approaching figure can no longer be ignored. 'Good evening.'

'Good evening. I represent . . .'

Why, it is Peace indeed; for here is the first commercial traveller, like a swallow after winter. He is a fresh-faced young man, just out of the army, and much more persuasive for the fact that his technique is still immature. Later, he will overdo it. Now he could sell me ant's-eggs or elephants. Actually it is a chemical steriliser for dairy utensils.

'I saw your man: I had a long talk with him about it.'

Good: Walter has already taken the edge off the assault. 'Well, what did he say to it?'

'He agreed with me that it was a very good thing to use.'

I look the young man sharply in the eye. I can detect no shadow of untruth in that blue answering gaze. Walter—agreed—that . . .

I have bought a consignment of the stuff. The young man has departed. The plants are being watered in.

My friend the station-master is enthusiastic for the land. He said, 'I'll come and help you with the hay.' One day, when it threatened rain, which only a stiff breeze seemed to hold off, he was walking down the line and saw us carting the last of our hay crop. He came over to us. 'Now's your chance,' I laughed.

In a moment he had slipped off his coat, saying, 'I've just time to fling up a load before the 3.15 is due.'

Seizing a fork, he bayoneted a cock of hay. Up it soared, and disintegrated like a shell-burst. The land-girl on the load tried to catch some on her fork. A fair amount of it sailed over the load and fell around me in a shower; the remainder mantled the head and body of the horse. It was short, slippery meadow hay, and it had been a long job scraping it into these cocks. They had settled down, and now, by putting in your fork carefully, and lifting quietly, it was possible to pitch two fair forkfuls before having to scrape around for the remainder. Our station-master's zest was excruciating. I saw spasmodic gestures of the land-girl's fork, as she looked around, as much as to say, 'Where did that one go?' The ground in our wake was carpeted. Walter was busy there, scraping the hay together again, and raking it off the chicken wire. We listened for the 3.15. At length a distant whistle sounded. The station-master planted his fork and took up his coat. 'Sorry I can't stop any longer now,' he said. 'Another day, perhaps.'

'Yes,' we cried. 'Another day.'

A peaceful Sunday, with the hay stacked, and rain falling intermittently on the rows of young plants in the garden. We had a memorable dish of peas for dinner, over which we vowed to grow no other sort again ever. They combine the advantage of earliness with pods as large as those of main-crop varieties, and their name is *Onwards*. 'I actually believe I have done too many,' Nora exclaimed. We *never* remember having had as many young peas as we could possibly eat. Martin passed his plate for more and yet more, Sylvia ate hers one by one, to count them. She had reached number two hundred and twenty seven. Adults had long since given up. Martin could eat no more. And still there were peas in the dish. I say, a memorable occasion. How politicians bellowing crescendo into microphones towards

polling-day, might envy the humble pea, the stripling carrot, that they can evoke such enthusiasm.

How pleasant it is to eat the produce of our labours. The pods and the carrot-tops are a treat for the heifers in the orchard, Molly and Star. These eat their way in two wide semi-circles through the deep grass which last year's poultry have caused to grow there. The heifers are tethered (as in Denmark) to prevent them trampling down the grass and spoiling it. There is so much of it that they will never get through it as grass; I shall have to cut some for hay. Molly chewing a *mar guerite* is a sight that pleases the children. Here there is work for the scythe again.

Poultry, bees, heifers, apples; then the various rich and rising greens of the big vegetable garden, with its characteristic structure of bean-poles and pea-sticks. It is the epitome of my farm. It has the essential virtue of variety. Nora brings back news from our market town that peas are marked in the shops at ninepence a pound. We compute the value retail of our three long rows. This acre or two of orchard and garden produces more than any other acre on the farm, in proportion as it absorbs more labour. You may even count the flowers, for they too have their price. Flowers: yes, very decidedly flowers must be accorded their place in husbandry. They represent that balance of life which I hope to see achieved when these days of sheer struggle to avert world-wide famine are past.

Labour: it all comes down to that. A wise farmer the other day stood up and said, 'You may have the best land in the country, but if you can't get the labour to work it, it's no use to you.' The better the land, of course, the more labour it demands if it is to give of its best. My friend has a source of labour in the village where his farm is situated. It has become something of a tradition that every summer all the women go with their children to pick the peas and beans he grows. Since he and his father have been growing these crops for about forty years,

those days of family picnics in his fields have become part of the life of that village. In another village it might be difficult to get the idea started.

I sometimes wonder whether the labour spent on producing and perfecting and maintaining machinery to do the work of the fields, is not as great as that which would be spent on doing it by hand as in the past. I do not mean the fairly simple machines, such as elevators to lighten the work of stack-building, but complicated things like milking-machines. Whether or not the work of making and maintaining machinery, and the factory environment it imposes, is considered preferable by those who do it, is another matter. It is not for me, just because I would rather mow with a scythe than work in a factory, to claim that everybody else ought to have the same preference. Meanwhile, I feel indebted to the man who arrives in answer to my telephone call and puts my tractor right, in more than a money sense. And when I visualise tractors coming off the conveyor belt, and the mechanics in attendance, I feel I am an exploiter of sweated labour. But that may be an illusion. I recognise, for better or worse, modern agriculture's dependence on the factory.

Which is a long way from the theme of my farm-garden, which depends for its tools on the smithy—or might easily do so. Curiously enough, the only thing which competes in thoroughness with the mechanical plough, as a soil-turner, is the spade. And I might add, not until the advent of the mechanical plough have we had anything that will cultivate the farm to the depth that a spade cultivates a garden.

All things are possible. Man must have bread and roses: farm, garden, factory, social exchange. Life must be various, and the variety fall into a pattern. When you look at an old and gracious English house, well-sited and built as with a dawn-wonder in the art of home, you feel a piety towards our English past, for the very Englishness that is in us. It seeks always to express itself. While one part of the Englishman perfects a jet-

propulsion plane, and seeks to mingle his drop in the ocean of the world, the other part would retire into his garden and make of it his world.

There is a genius of gardens, of farms not so very different from gardens; of planting, of breeding, of making things grow. For the life of us, we must cultivate- In the summer dawn, as wood-pigeons call to one another, old England is in the very air; not only old England, but eternal England; that which we divined as children playing by the brook. We seek it always. There is a vision of England, which becomes clearer as I grow older. To whichever horizon I turn, there it stands. If an old thing can quicken the spirit it cannot be dead. This does not leave a man moodily nostalgic; but gives him joy in his children, enraptures him with his wife, with corn, with sunlight.. He takes hold of eternal cords and knots them to him, and prays that they cannot be loosened. Vivid as lightning in himself as to what is sure, how can he 'regret the past' in what he sees?

Sometimes, in the life of labour, I take a book from a shelf, read a sonnet or glance at a picture, pause a minute. Then I go out to the fields again. That fragment of words or colour becomes a daybreak of the mind, lighting the whole realm of inner man. We speak vaguely of the company of great minds to be found in books. It is something more than that. They are fragments of one power; the English writers are fragments of one power, which breathes also out of the very stones of old manors, to which, when an Englishman feels himself joined, it is joy to him. Joy breeds. Having this, the Englishman remains unmoved by meteor planes, whether they whisk him to the Antipodes, as they usefully may *do*. They will return him all the sooner to his own place.

Having this sense of what is stored in great books, music, pictures, one dare not despair at the apparent failure so far of universal education to educate. Charlecote Manor is no fair

exchange for an illiterate peasantry. Not even antique piety. Life then was ritual. Life to-day is research. We prepare for the life that is ritual at a higher level. There is piety in the shape of an old cottage: there is profound contemplation in the architecture of a cathedral.

When I think of what has been written, of the grace of words, all founded on this clay . . . When I *think* of paintings ; of Harry Becker devoting his life to uncovering the glory of the moment in farm labour—from the pitching of a sheaf to a ben pecking at a seed. When I think of one picture I glanced at yesterday between bouts of work (it was by Botticelli, but the common experience of husbandry translated it for me into a Suffolk idiom), when I think of these I am amazed at what we inherit here on earth.

The picture is of the Nativity. The stable is a pent-house built against a rock: it shelters the Holy Family and farm animals. The supports are rough posts out of the hedge: I can see myself cutting them, saying 'that one's a bit bent at the top, but it'll do.' Every time I have built a rough shelter for calves or pigs, I have built—for a Botticelli or a Becker—a little ante-room to heaven. That cow there by the Holy Babe; 'she's been a good old cow—she never comes in with a great flush of milk at calving like some do, but she holds out well, you can't really dry her off.' And the donkey—'He'll pull as good a load home as some horses: I've hitched him on the plough too, along with the old mare.'

Above the improvised roof there is a garland of angels, a linked and living coronal.

The one lesson that the circumstances of Christ's coming should have taught us is that it occurred among the common things of every day. Yet nothing is more difficult to appreciate. The stable has become a piece of scenery, a Christmas-card myth. And yet it might equally have happened *in* the hovel in the cow-yard as in Botticelli's pent-house. There is no make-

believe about that penthouse: it is a typical piece of small-holder's improvisation; the rock a convenient thing to build on; and the roof neatly thatched. Then look for angels over your pantiles; for clouds, tenderly lit, high strangers passing over your straw-yard. Watch them awhile, and you will see that Botticelli's angels are but the moving face of heaven in human form.

In the spirit that the painting puts on my farm, it does not seem so important that a cow should give eight hundred gallons, or that a donkey is an inefficient power unit. I see my farm animals as for themselves alone, each an individual whose loss would not be an arithmetical figure simply. That is just how Walter regards cows and horses. So it no longer seems strange, the tale I have been told by the village, of how his father once kept a boar although he had no sow, just because he was fond of it. It slept with a bull in a corner of the straw-yard. The bull and the boar were friends. This boar he used to go and seek each evening at acorn-time among the 'roughs', and sometimes found him in a neighbour's beet-field. This boar, angry at being chased from his feast, once turned on his master, foamed at the mouth, and pursued him all the way back to his own farm. Where, as father, exhausted, leaped (or tumbled over) a gate, Walter came to the rescue with a dog (another favourite), who fought the boar for half an hour, after which the boar, thoroughly beaten, crept under a manger. 'That taught him. He never come that trick again.' But he remained the pet of his master.

8

Water at Last

IT is a wonder and thankfulness to me that electricity, the power that carries messages from brain to limbs, jumping a gap,

I am told, at the nerve-endings, also pumps the water for my farm stock. Formerly, at the end of a long, hot harvest day, it would be, 'We shall need a load of water for the cows.' So away we would go to the pond in Spring Field that never failed, and fill the water-cart by passing buckets to one another. A little was spilt from each bucket: the path to the pond became slippery. Sometimes there were three of us, and what with our tiredness and the path's slipperiness, we nearly knocked each other into the pond like ninepins. And as for backing the water-cart ready for filling—. It had one swivelling wheel in front. The shafts of iron (a bit bent) would rise up over Kitty's head when she tried to back. I had to hold the shaft down and try to get the cart to go back straight. First the front wheel would lock to the right, then to the left, and the back of the cart swung into the hedge or the corn. The more I was in a hurry, the longer it took. Kitty would look at me, as I stood facing her, as much as to say, 'Personal abuse will not help. My back legs are stiff.' Only patience, and pretending I had all night to do it in, got the cart backed against the pond.

When it was full I started homeward. At the first pull a gallon or two splashed out, for the cart had long ago lost its lid. When it came to a halt by the tank in the meadow another lot splashed out, to the refreshment of the ground and a duck who happened to be following.

I do not know how many hundreds of years this farm has stood here with no water nearer than the pool in Spring Field, unless you count the pond into which the effluvia of the yards used to drain. Walter has said 'If the old pond stink, that's a sign of fine weather.' In this corner of East Anglia we have a considerable amount of fine weather.

In the course of innumerable generations nobody has ever sunk a well on this farm. That is a source of wonder to me. I picture the workaday life of the people of this farm through the ages. The making of butter alone requires a great deal of clean

cold water. There is excellent water at sixty-five feet, I am puzzled to assess the outlook of our farming forefathers about this; and of their womenfolk. Were they so poor? They could have done it themselves. Were they so pious that they believed that the end of the world was at hand, as in the former days of faith, so they might as well carry on for a few more years with the stinking pond and the distant spring? I do not know. I do know that there were plenty of well-sinkers in those days, and of bricklayers; plenty of local brickyards too, and plenty of country tradesmen of all kinds. The difficulties then of having a well sunk were as nothing to the difficulties of getting it undertaken to-day. The cost now is great; more than a small farmer can afford. The men who can do the job are few and old.

Nevertheless, the offer of a government grant of up to fifty per cent of the cost, and the thought of trying to back that water-cart to the pond at the end of long days of labour, made me determined to try for a well. But I must be sure of receiving the government grant.

I filled in forms, and waited. People came to see me and to see my farm from various departments of the official hierarchy of agriculture. Sometimes men came, sometimes women. They came across the fields to me where I was at work. We confronted each other across deep ditches, or talked glimpsing each other through impenetrable hedges. Sometimes I scrambled across a ditch to them: sometimes they thrust through a hedge to me, and came mopping a cheek or wrist with a handkerchief. Once, when I was in the harvest field, an officer from the Milk Marketing Board came towards me through one gateway, a female official of the Milk Production Department of the W. A.E.C, through another, while a drainage officer paced the neighbouring meadow.

I was told, unofficially, that though the water grant was at the forefront of agricultural publicity, in actual practice it was difficult to obtain. However, after showing my visitors the

Water at Last 107 renovated cow-byre, I contrived to talk the matter over with them leaning over the yard gate, gazing at the bubbly, brilliant green scum with which nature mantles muck-water in summer. 'This is my present water-supply. The smell is a sign of fine weather, my man says.'

They all reported that I was a clear case for the maximum grant, and I got it. Not so easy, though, to find my well-sinker. I found him at last sinking wells as fast as he and his mates could go. Which was not very fast, since every crumb of earth was dug out by himself a spadeful at a time, and hoisted up in a bucket by his two mates turning the handle of a winch. The average age of the three was seventy-two years.

It is curious how the most mechanised of wars should have stimulated ancient country trades into activity. The well-sinker and the blacksmith both say that their jobs were dead before the war, and now they don't know which way to turn, they are so busy.

I had a long talk with the well-sinker. The question as to whether there would be water after he had dug for it, did not trouble him at all. He pooh-poohed the idea of having a water-diviner. 'If you want to waste five pounds . . .' He knew the district: he knew where water was. There was plenty of water on my farm, he said. His mind was a subterranean map.

'Well, now . . .'

'Well, in about six months time.'

So we left it.

In winter the problem of water is one of over-supply. And there are many other things to think about from day to day. So when, one February morning, I came across the fields to breakfast and saw a wooden tripod erected on the edge of the home meadow, I wondered what it was. Then I saw the three old men standing among a medley of their gear. They were blowing their hands, lighting pipes, and looking around them like mariners thrown up on a strange coast with what had been saved

from the wreck of a sailing ship; spars, ropes and chains. I welcomed them warmly in the sudden prospect that after hundreds of years, here a well was actually about to be sunk. The last well, surely, of the last of the old country well-diggers. Having been a digger all his life, he naturally did not see much point in boring for water when you could have an ample supply by sinking a well sixty-seven feet. Everybody I spoke to about the well took it for granted that I was having a bore, and was greatly surprised when I said no, it was to be a bricked well dug by hand.

The well-sinker asked me, 'Where will you have it?' I had a mental picture of a water-diviner with his hazel rod stopping at a certain spot and saying, 'There's water just here.' But the well-sinker, with a sweep of his hand, said, 'There's plenty of water anywhere about here: I know.' So we chose a suitable site near the house, and I only hoped his confidence would be justified.

'We shall find water at sixty-three feet: I'll make the well sixty-seven: that will give you four feet of water.'

'Will that be enough?' I asked.

'Why, four feet of water would supply this farm twice over.'

I could but marvel at his certainty and hope that he was right.

He told me he had to supply details of every well he sinks to the Ministry of Agriculture; not only the depth at which the water is encountered, but also the various strata of earth through which he digs. So in the course of time a complete map of subterranean water in the country becomes available. Although he was so old, he worked by the light of science, from the data of a lifetime of experience: he obviously regarded water-divining as mumbo-jumbo, and redundant in any case, unless you wanted to spend five pounds to see a twig turn over.

Every day the two older men stood facing each other, winding the handles of the winch, like toy figures worked by the wind. The buckets of earth came slowly to the surface. First

of all subsoil, as the well-sinker worked waist-deep in the ground: then brick-earth, and only his head was visible: then blue clay, and he had disappeared altogether. After the blue clay, he met a vein of hard, shingly stuff, which had to be dislodged with a mattock. The men at the winch had periods of stillness, as though the wind had ceased blowing: they puffed at pipes. Then, at a call out of the earth, they started winding again.

'When we come to the sand, we shall get on much fester,' they said. There was much looking forward to this reaching the sand. Apparently, once they came to the sand everything would be easy. But the sand was a long time in prospect. Every time I went and leaned over the hole in the earth, the appropriate question was, 'Have you come to the sand yet?'

At last they came to it, and there was rejoicing. But it gave place to 'loamy stuff', then another vein of blue clay. It had only been a pocket of sand: disappointment hung over the well.

Before further progress could be made, it was necessary to line with bricks the hole so far dug. Bricks were harrowed from a pile which a lorry had delivered near the gate. In the middle of the barrow journey pipes would go out, and have to be re-lit, which necessitated a tremendous shove to get the barrow's wheel moving again through the mud. The portion of brick-work was built on some curved pieces of wood, which fitted the circumference of the well, and these were attached by chains to similar curved pieces which ringed the top edge. The whole of the brick-lining was suspended thus, while another twelve feet or so of the well was excavated. Then another portion of brick-work was built up to meet it.

In the long intervals between the spells of brick-laying, the square pile of bricks by the gate became a convenient resting-place for tools, and those various pieces of old iron which always seem to be in demand on a farm for some purpose or other. It is extraordinary how invariably any vacant surface on a farm collects this clutter of objects. Angles in this pile of new

bricks became also seats for dolls; there were niches in which stood little messes of mud and chopped leaves, on which dolls feasted, garlanded with the first of the year's daisy chains.

One day the bucket rose up out of the well and deposited a golden heap on the ground. There was a stir of pleasure and relief at the well-head. Sand had been found.

Then, all the next week the well-sinkers did not appear. The land drains had ceased to run, and cottage folk who collected their drinking water from land drains through, the winter, were agitating to have their pumps and wells put in order. Another week went by, and then I heard that the chief of the three well-sinkers had had an accident while driving his pony cart. He had been overturned into the ditch with the cart on top of him, and now lay in hospital in a serious condition.

For weeks the tripod stood deserted beside the heap of sand. Cows going out to grass rubbed against it, and knocked it over. We collected the sprawled legs and laid them over the boarded top of the well. The other two men were too old to go down a well: it was their chief who did all the digging. So my hope of water faded; for he was the last of the well-diggers. Like all artists and craftsmen whose work is their life and who never retire, he seemed destined to die with work unfinished, and it to be my lot (or privilege) to possess that fragment.

He was getting better, I was told; but the doctor had said to him, 'You will dig no more wells.' But he had replied, 'I've a well not finished.'

I had my water-cart repaired. At the ends of hot harvest days it was trundled to the pond in Spring Field, and backed by Kitty, who crossed her stiff legs and pretended she was going to fall down. The chain of three buckets was passed to and fro.

Then one day in late summer, the well-digger and his two mates re-appeared. The tripod was soon on its legs again; the boards off the top of the well. The old man sat dangling on a small plank suspended from the winch chain, and down he dis-

appeared into the earth. He took a kitchen chair with him, 'In case I should come over queer,' he said.

And he did come over queer. He had not been working more than ten minutes when everything went black before his eyes, he said. All we knew was that there was absolute silence at the bottom of the shaft thirty feet down. But he came to again; called out that he was all right, and was hoisted up for a breath of air. He went down again, and soon the bucket-loads of bright sand began to come up.

He had two candles now; one burning on a ledge half-way down, the other beside him to enable him to see to work. The higher candle was for a signal of foul air. Should foul air come into the well-shaft the candle would go out. Once it did: but the candle beside him still burned. He was raised as quickly as possible through the pocket of foul air, by three people working on the winch. It was no longer possible for the two old men to wind the heavy bucket up so far; so Walter or another was with them all day, except when they paused in their excavating to brick the sides. That meant one less on the land at the time of ploughing and autumn sowing, but I put up with that for the sake of water.

Every day I looked at the well-digger anxiously, remembering the doctor's words, 'You'll sink no more wells.' But already he had promised to deepen a well for a neighbour. The doctor had ordered him milk in the mid-mornings. I offered him as much milk as he could drink; the milk of Strawberry, my best cow.

Now, when I looked down the well-shaft', nothing was visible but a tiny subterranean star in a disk of darkness. The two chief dangers of well-sinking are foul air and having the bucket fall on you. I was disturbed to see that the winch had no ratchet, but only a crotched stick, its end thrust in the ground and the crotch staying the handle. If it were displaced, the bucket must fall fifty feet in a moment, so far as I could see. The well-

digger's former master had been killed by a falling bucket, and this man's life for half a century seemed to have depended on no more than a crotched stick thrust into the clay.

One afternoon, when the well-digger was hoisted into daylight, he gave news that he had come to water. I was pleased, but he was not. He had struck water at sixty-one feet, and he had reckoned on striking it at sixty-three. It upset his calculations in regard to the depth of the final section of brick-work.

'Now we shall have to diddle it out.' Didn't I know what a diddle was? It was a kind of shovel set at a right-angle to its handle. Every morning he went down in waders and 'diddled' the water which had collected in the bottom of the well into a twelve-gallon bucket with this implement. It took a long time; and every day, twice a day, before resuming his excavation, the well had to be emptied of its water. Had I had a portable pump, I could have pumped all this water into a tank: but I hadn't, and the full bucket was so heavy that all the men could do was to turn it over where it stood, and let the water run out. Meanwhile the water-cart went its daily journey to Spring Field.

At last the well was finished, and according to well-sinkers' etiquette, I as master was required to journey down on the little seat to the bottom of the well and join the well-sinker there in a final inspection of the work. As my feet were about to hit the water the man shouted 'Woa,' and I was lowered no farther. I have heard that on occasion the cry of 'Woa' has been disregarded, and the sound of a big splash has been the signal to stop the winch.

As I dangled over the water, with daylight the size of a penny above my head, I thought: it is something that there is enough trust between one human being and another that one should allow oneself to be lowered to the bottom of a well.

A lorry came and the well-sinking gear was loaded up; and the three old men seated themselves among it and departed—to another job.

That night it rained, and all the next day. It rained for weeks. That autumn there were floods of water everywhere. But now it is summer again. The motor over the well hums, and we turn on taps in pasture and in yard. The water-cart stands in a corner. I keep its axles greased. You never know.

This afternoon, Sunday, we have witnessed the great play. Cinderella—humanity's favourite theme, whether as the original fable, or disguised in modern dress as novel or magazine story. Ever since she came home from school on Friday evening Anthea has been in earnest conference with Sylvia. Martin is not certain that this play-acting is manly, and is unenthusiastic; so he has been assigned a small part. Their mother's fruit-bottling (it is a seven-day week for the country housewife) has suffered awkward interruptions by requests for pieces of stuff for dresses.

I was asked to mow a patch of the long grass in the orchard. 'For a stage?' I asked. I discovered that the grass was to be carried upstairs and strewn on the floor to give realism to an out-of-door scene. On this, I emphatically recommended an open-air theatre. The idea was at first turned down, then accepted. I found that Nora had suggested the same thing without success, but for another reason; to avoid the moving of heavy furniture to make space for a 'stage', to the detriment of the carpet. When she heard of the realism of mown grass on the floor, she was grateful for my powers of persuasion. So we returned to our jobs happily, she to her fruit, I to clipping the hedge.

Just before dinner a big black cloud blew up. Anthea came to me with puckered brow and asked did I think it would rain? I said I didn't think so. She came out again a little later and said, 'I'm dreadfully anxious, because if it rained it would spoil everything: I'd really much rather have the play indoors.' I enquired how much of the scenery for the play had already been

taken out under the apple trees. 'Only two chairs and Teddy. Teddy has to be one of the ugly sisters.' Having myself endured agonies of suspense over black clouds recently while hay-making, I sympathised with her anxieties. Especially at dinner-time : for it was going to be a very good dinner. So I assented to indoors, stipulating that leafy branches should be substituted for mown grass to suggest the open-air scene. This was agreed, and Anthea went bounding away to collect the branches.

After dinner the play was performed. The audience consisted of father, mother, grandmother and Martin (most of the time). The cast was ; Anthea, Sylvia, two dolls and Martin (very small part). There being no curtains, the audience were bidden to use their own; i.e. to shut their eyes between one scene and another. There were a few explanatory words as introduction. 'That thing that looks like a chair turned on its back is a fireplace. And when you see the old blue shawl hung up, you must imagine it's a beautiful tapestry and you are in a splendid palace. Every candle you see means a hundred candles.'

The play began. Cinderella was discovered clad in pre-family remnants of summer frocks, sweeping industriously. ('Dear me, I'd no idea there was so much dust in that carpet,' one feminine member of the audience was heard to mutter.) Two dolls sat peremptorily watching Cinderella work. A voice 'off' spoke for them, high and shrill. They were then arrayed for the ball to which Cinderella was not invited, and escorted to the door trailing yards of old silk frock. Then the fairy godmother entered, complete with wand and pink paper wings.

The metamorphosis of the pumpkin was achieved by means of a toy football and a little tin coach which had been a Coronation novelty, and once contained biscuits. The relative sizes of coach and Cinderella were unimportant; a mere matter of mental perspective. Cinderella's change from rags to ball dress was

accomplished literally in the twinkling of an eye, the audience causing their eyes to close for a few minutes for the purpose.

This closing of the eyes between scenes was not difficult after a good dinner on a summer afternoon, and grandma was not as prompt as the rest of us to awake to the splendours of the palace ballroom. Certain sounds of the scene-shifters had kept the maternal eyelids flickering nervously: clatterings as of china objects in collision, tinkling of glass against glass, scratching of match on matchbox, a sotto-voce 'Mind your fingers—oh, dear it's gone out again.'

At last, 'Now you can look.' There stood the dazzling Cinderella-princess and the prince (ex-fairy-godmother, trousered in a pair of Martin's pyjamas) dancing a minuet together. A small table set as for a banquet with lighted candles, plates and glasses, was wonderfully missed by the bowing, curt-seying and pirouetting couple. This was a most exciting scene. There was a burst of applause when at last they sat down at the table.

The prince could not eat for praising his partner's beauty, and at last summoned up courage to ask her name. At that moment the clock (Martin) dinged twelve, and Cinderella fled, kicking off a shoe as she went.

Finally we see Cinderella in her rags sweeping as before, with the ugly sisters watching, and telling her (ventriloquism by Sylvia) of the splendours of the ball and the beauty of the unknown princess. This is interrupted by the Blast of a Trumpet (Martin, in my ear). Enter a herald (Sylvia) robed in velvet (oh, memories of that honeymoon in Kent) and wearing an imposing headdress, which is a tribute to the rarity of crackers, that it should have lasted from Christmas into July. The ugly sisters protest that the slipper fits them, and laugh at the idea of Cinderella trying it on. But the slipper, of course, fits Cinderella ('she'll need a size larger soon: shoes are a problem these days'); and there is surprise, envy and rejoicing, while

the herald merges into the Prince and takes Cinderella's hand. He has to release it for a moment while she fetches the other shoe from somewhere about her person and puts it on. Thereupon, wedding bells (Martin), and a minuet and madrigal.

So we go out again into the summer sunshine in complete catharsis; I to my hedge-cutting, grandma to shelling beans, while the cast play rounders. In the midst of a rounder, Martin pauses, seeing his mother at an open window. 'Mummy,' he asks, 'when we see a real play shall we have to do lots of shuttings of eyes and imaginings?'

9

Some Thistles in the Sheaves

THE meadows are as brown as a Jersey cow: close to the ground the wild white clover flowers. The corn begins to colour. It warns me once again that that interval between hay and corn harvest in which so many jobs were to be done, is an illusion. We are still bringing wagon-loads of hay into the yard. At least there is the satisfaction that we have it stacked at home, close beside the cow-yard, to counterbalance the greater speed of those who use a sweep and stack it in the field. My neighbour, who has some meadows at a distance from his buildings, hires a motor-lorry. This, when fully loaded and well-roped, swings away down the road at thirty miles an hour, with the load-builders sitting on top, missing overhanging boughs by inches.

There is some competition between us; Walter being firmly of the opinion that they can carry no more on that lorry than we can pile on our wagon, and Toni tries to prove it with every load. The fact that the lorry is the wider vehicle he annuls by laying out our load on either side, till it looks like a loaf balanced on a knife-blade. This does very well till the two loads

happen to meet going in different directions along the narrow road. Then the load-sitters shake hands, snatch each other's hats and make holiday, while the drivers argue about inches far below. The loads exchange a little hay. We pass in good odour, notwithstanding that the load-builders have grabbed out handfuls of each other's loads and criticised the quality.

Hay is still credited with all the virtues among the small farmers of the village. 'You can't beat good hay.' It is an article of faith. Nobody has time to experiment with silage, let alone grass-drying with its expensive machinery. They read the farming papers and see these things in print, but the old wain rumbles into their yards with its loads of hay as formerly. And that is how farming actually is on the average-sized holding, with the single exception of the tractor. The mechanical horse is universal.

I had an interview with an old small-holder who was being evicted from his farm for bad management. He was a peasant cultivator straight out of the past; but to excuse arrears of cultivation, he said he was trying to get a new gear-box for his tractor, as he might have said he was trying to buy a new horse.

A good stack of hay is almost as important to a man as his house. Young stock will grow on it; cows (some say) will milk on it; and 'Hay is the mother of a horse,' affirms the old horsekeeper. Even when the leys, and then the meadows, are cut and carried, the small farmers continue fetching hay out of odd corners—out of orchards, out of the graveyard, and from verges where you can hardly take a true swing with a scythe for some obstruction. Only the corn harvest puts an end to this gathering of the hay.

Hay is handy stuff to feed, and all stock like it. What a care-free time it was before these scientifically balanced rations of concentrates for cows. Now we are preoccupied with calculations of starch-equivalent, of 11/2 parts of this to 2 parts of that, and 'feed at the rate of 4 pounds to the gallon over and above the

first gallon in summer and the first half-gallon in winter.' John carries in his pocket a little book of tables of starch-equivalent, from which he makes abstruse calculations. Unfortunately he is not very good at arithmetic, and the result is a mathematical bog, out of which we flounder to go and feed the cows, giving them as usual all about the same, with an extra bowl of dairy nuts for Daisy because she is milking well. To 'feed for five gallons' (as the books say) is one thing: it is quite another to get it. Anyhow, nobody can agree about cows. Some say cows are chronically overfed: others say the cow has four stomachs and they all need filling.

Hay is cosy stuff to feed in the depth of winter. Corn, hay and water—muck out: so simple. To cart kale in slush and sleet is quite another matter. When snow lay on the ground, my neighbour took a truss of hay to some heifers wintering out. 'To warm their old insides,' he said. Nora said, 'It wouldn't warm mine.'

I have on occasion written verses, and put them away in a drawer, usually unfinished. Months later, rummaging for a feeding-stuffs receipt, I have come upon them; and then I experience a feeling of eagerness mingled with misgiving. An idea winks at me for a moment through the words like the moon through clouds. It demands to be wrestled with further; to be brought forth and finished. I shove it under the papers again.

When I go and look at a growing crop which I have not seen for awhile by reason of other work on the farm, I have just this same feeling. As I approach the gateway, an eagerness mingled with trepidation. Will the corn have grown and thickened? Or will there be a crop of thistles bristling up over the expanse of ears? Will the rows of roots be full of weeds again? Is May-weed smothering the young lucerne? And that 4-year grass ley, costing about £3 an acre for seed alone, twice (it failed the first

time), i.e. £6 an acre apart from labour: will my first glance at it since a fortnight signal failure or success?

By Jove, how those beans have grown, how well they are podded: that augurs a lean time for the feeding-stuffs merchant. I depart from that field whistling. I come to the kale: the tune dies on my lips. What an ass I was to try sowing it thick like that. All because of one of those articles in the farming press, with persuasive photographs, about a farmer who sowed kale broadcast, and said that thereby he saved all the hoeing, because it grew so thick that it smothered the weeds, and produced an abundance of nourishing leaf rather than thick woody stems. There was a photograph of it being cut in the depth of winter with a tractor pulling a cut-lift outfit. It looked as simple and labour-saving as you could wish for, and I said, 'That's a good idea: why do we all undertake this laborious hoeing of a spaced-out kale crop?'

Being the son of a journalist, I should not have been taken in by all that. But like an ass I was. The cut-lift apparatus being worked by a wheeled tractor in the depth of winter should have warned me. But no. In mid-March, deserted naturally by Walter's mental co-operation, I drilled kale as thick as corn, taking much care over the operation. I had first sown a generous amount of fertiliser on that acre. The kale germinated excellently and I was delighted.

'You've enough kale there to set the whole parish,' was Walter's only comment.

I had chosen what appeared to be a clean bit of land. So far everything worked well. Now the kale would grow and smother the weeds. But instead the weeds grew and smothered the kale. They were just the ordinary annual weeds like chickweed and groundsel. The choked and crowded kale turned a sickly yellow. We spent days hand-hoeing it. Then I scattered sulphate of ammonia over it, and it perked up a bit. But when I looked again, it had relapsed to its former sickly, stunted hue.

I distributed more sulphate of ammonia. Now it looks blue and very thirsty, though there is a record crop of corn on the same land beside it; and the weeds look like outstripping it again. This of course increases Walter's scorn of modern experimental ideas. All that is needed is a tractor with a cut-lift bogged down there in December, to complete the picture.

But the wheat, which began doubtfully, has pulled itself together, and will be at least an average crop. The three-acres in particular stands level and thick: it is good to look upon. I have a desire to go on looking at it; it fills the eye. But there is a sense too of what is yet to be done; the labour of harvesting it, and the many crises of weather, of wagon-loading, of stack-building that are before us in that field. I know that farming is an art by the feeling I have in looking at my corn, a wish to prolong the sunny calm of evening and go on looking; at the same time a desire to hasten to-morrow so that one can continue with the work. The colour of it, changing now from green to golden, challenges me. Unlike other arts, it will not wait.

Barley in full ear is a lovely sight at sunset. The spines of the ears stick out like rays: the ears curving over are caught by the light and stand singled out, like shoals of small fish leaping in a rippling sea.

At mid-day the winter oats shine out black from the chaff on the ear and—Mr. Winch is back again. Mr. Winch is for me the embodiment of these fields, their work and their weather. He is old now: he has retired from forming a farm of his own; but he still farms for others.

He has been absent on a visit to a brother in another part of Suffolk. For many weeks now, the market-day procession of vehicles has lacked his characteristic figure. He goes to market with the same solemnity with which he goes to church. Farming is a moral force, and he makes you feel it. 'Master, land is the honestest thing,' he says.

Yesterday evening I was working in my garden, but thinking of my winter oats. It is only just mid-July: the hay-stacks are not thatched: the wind has blown the roof-ridge off one of them: but the oats need cutting.

'Mind how you dig that/ I knew that voice immediately. I guessed its next sentence. ' You've got a forrard bit of oats over there: you want to get your binder out, don't, you'll lose half of 'em shelling out on to the stubble.' He looked around him, and again I winced inwardly, seeing where his eyes rested. 'Ah, master, if you'd pinned the ridge of your stack down with a few thatching stakes, you'd have saved yourself the job of pitching your last load of hay up twice.' I knew it, had been telling myself that ever since yesterday's gale; but Mr. Winch's words have the sting of a lifetime of foresight. If only Walter weren't such an optimist about the weather. 'That won't rain to-night.' He has only to say that for it to pour.

'I hardly expected a gale like that just now,' I began lamely.

'Ah, master, when you've seen as much of what the weather can do as I have, you'll never put no faith in it.'

'Well, it's good to see you back in these parts again, Mr. Winch,' I say to change the subject. Certainly I did not see how a harvest could proceed here without his presence. Had he not appeared at the colouring of the corn, I should have presumed that he were dead.

'They oats won't want cutting till the end of the week,' is Walter's opinion. So I plan to start cutting them on Wednesday, allowing two days discount for his conservatism and caution. (He feels there is something almost presumptive in being the first to have your binder at work.) I do it also to avoid a crowded Saturday afternoon of trying to get the cutting finished and the sheaves all shocked up by nightfall, with the land-girl thinking of George walking out with someone else, John away at a Friends' meeting, Toni working like a whirlwind in an effort both to finish the work *and* have a remnant of evening with his

friends. It is uncomfortable working like that. There will be delays, of course. Reaping machines do not take kindly to exercise after a year of idleness.

I have a volunteer harvest helper: a young man who is training to be a parson. He has come to do harvest work, but the first thing I set him on to is burning bushes; the remnants of a huge meadow-hedge. He makes no complaint at the unseasonable task, but heaves and sweats and scratches his hands and face, and sings his hair.

Walter meanwhile is deeply involved in preparing the binder. Walter has vanished: the binder has a human voice, and in addition to its wheels, two human legs sticking out in odd places.

I take the remaining good scythe to cut matted flattened grass in the orchard for the cows, in an effort to stem the shrinkage of the milk. I manage to hack some off; it takes a long time for a little grass. I lay it by the gate of the brown bald pasture. The cows come with udder-flapping alacrity, stretch their necks through the gap of a missing bar and drag it in. To-day is a day of thunderstorms.

Another morning finds Walter and me both entangled in the binder, wrestling with round-headed bolts that turn, and nuts rusted on. With bolts that have not enough thread, for which we have not enough washers. We gaze hopefully around on the ground that a washer may spring to the eye. That a feather or an old bent nail may present itself, with which to scour out an oil-hole. There is the annual puzzle of the binder canvases, which is which, and which way on should it go?

There are well-known expedients: an outsize nut does for a washer ('collar' to the farm worker); a bent nail for a split pin. Those heaps of old iron in corners now become treasuries, in which some remembered bit of tin of the wanted shape may be lurking. If only bolts grew like corn: I should sow an acre, and another acre of split pins.

The day wears on. The colts break out and stampede over a fallow. We stamp after them. We chase them back to the 'roughs', stop a gap with thorns. Walter becomes reminiscent of other horses that wandered miles in other days. 'And now I reckon it's about dinner-time.'

At last we get the horses hitched to the binder, and move out to the field. There, dogs, a cat and babies must first be got put of the corn and out of danger. The land-girl has a promised half-day off to go and see her mother: it happens to be to-day. Walter looks like a blurred photograph of himself, the binder is shaking so. He points to fissures in the ground every yard or so. 'That's where your tractor-wheels went in the spring.'

It is a great moment when the binder starts again for the first time since last summer, and actually throws out a bound sheaf. But usually it doesn't. There is a cry of 'Woa!' and the knotter is found to be full of bits of last-year's straw.

Sammy Handlock back from school (and a science film), becomes horse-boy, whip in hand and cap askew. His application of it amounts to little more than keeping off the flies from their flanks, but he makes a valiant ncise, and there is an urgent to-do over the cutting of the three acres, so that passers-by stop at the gate and look.

A small boy comes. 'Please, Mr. M. says one of your cows is in his orchard.'

I hasten to Mr. M.'s orchard, wondering what has gone wrong with the electric fence; that fence which I thought a boy could **put** up in an hour or so, **but** which with much hammering of stakes into ground like concrete, and breaking of insulators (which Sammy calls 'excavators') and entanglement in skeins of wire, two strong men with strong language took half a day to fix up.

I chase Strawberry out of the orchard (her rightful place, she thought?) and repair the fence, and give myself an electric

shock (after a pause to summon up courage) to make sure it is working. Then return to that other shocking of corn.

We finish standing up the sheaves at the same time as the binder finishes cutting. Five rabbits escaped from the corn, and one was killed—by Walter who leaped from the binder seat on to it. Martin has been helping us set up the sheaves, staggering along under a sheaf as big as himself. He soon learns not to stand them upside down.

But I never feel that harvest has really begun until the wheat is ready to cut. Wheat is a paradox: it is the Cinderella of corn crops in this country. Already, a bare few months after the war has ended, they tell us the store-houses are full of wheat; merchants dare not buy any more from farmers, and on the eve of harvest there are last-year's stacks not threshed. 'But we are told that Europe is starving for bread,' I said to my merchant. 'Yes,' he answered, 'but the mills of the continent are in ruins.' One forgets these bottlenecks in production; that wheat is by no means bread.

Lammas with its loaf offered at the altar is not the same as harvest festival. Had all the old country mills been in action, wind- and water-mills, instead of the power being concentrated into a few large units, the wheat might have flowed freely, and there been bread for all. If we cannot learn to keep the peace in Europe, we must disperse our power into parish units. To prepare for war and to plan our industrial plant on the assumption of peace is contradictory.

Whatever the reason, wheat in this country appears to be, in official eyes, only an emergency crop. And yet in the country of this country, in the hearts of the people of this country, **wheat** is the king of corn. And that will ever be so. You cannot get **the** countryman to regard modern priorities such as lettuces, tomatoes, eggs, even milk, as anything like so important. To say, as you pick an acre of tomatoes, 'This gives babies vitamin C,' is not the same as in mowing an acre of wheat, 'This is men's life.'

In a book called *Autumn Fields* by Michael Home, there is a memorable passage in which the author, as a boy, sees six men mowing corn with scythes in the sunrise. In a few sentences he conveys that instantaneous impression of many years ago straight into the reader's mind. Nothing is lost: you see those men pressing forward in an oblique line against the wall of corn, and catch their inspiring urgency. We still mow corn, but now only a narrow passage round the edge of the field to give the binder room.

It is a Saturday. I have rubbed out kernels of wheat in my hand: they have changed in the last two days from a milky juice to a mealy consistency: the wheat is fit to harvest. I chew the grainy and remember how Mr. Colville used to say, 'I always have a belly-ache at harvest, chanking the grains of corn.' Yea, it is an irrepressible habit, chewing grains of corn—until you get an oat husk down your throat; that cures you of it for awhile. But you soon find yourself at it again, cracking horse-beans with your remaining good teeth, or cracking the teeth.

The wheat is fit, but it is Saturday. So often Sunday seems to come inopportune. In former days the reaping of the first sheaf was a celebration; all the farm hands were present round a cask of beer, and banded themselves together formally there into a harvest gang.

Now to-day, Saturday noon-tide, I am alone with my corn, except for Walter who is thatching a hay-stack. I am particularly fond of the farm on Saturday afternoons: an ancient peace seems to return to it. Mr. Colville used to say, 'I like to walk round in the evening, when the men have gone home: you seem to be able to think better.' Yes, the farm then reveals itself to you as a whole; it becomes a being: it is a microcosm of the Creation on the Seventh Day. I like best to be alone on the farm with the family. The two loves blend and become one, even a strong tide. This I felt as we stood looking at our wheat,

some of which I had cut. The scythe was in my hands, and Nora had brought a basket with tea, and the children were with her. We sat on the grassy verge, close to the corn, whose ripe ears against the sky were the limit of our view. There were sparrows and dragon-flies hovering among them. There we had tea, a small party, and it was a quiet initiation into harvest. I would not have exchanged it for the roistering, traditional affair. Afterwards, Nora helped by binding some of the wheat into sheaves as I mowed.

'Romance' has becomeathing detachedfrom life,unsinewed. Man—woman: a field of ripening corn. There is the scene; but what is the reality of it? Love—a field of wheat. The popular symbols only become effective when you cease staring at the wheat together and do something about it. Then, you mow your best, sweeping the corn you cut with every stroke right across to your left side, where it should lie in a compact mass, ears all together, and not sprawled about. That eases your partner's task in binding. But it is by no means easy to accomplish, despite the wooden rack or 'cradle' you fix to your scythe for the purpose; and if you mow clumsily, and your spouse has to shuffle the sheaf into shape, and go gleanng about after stray stalks, she is likely to love you less. If you, turning in your toil, see sheaves that are level-headed and neatly bound, you have an added pride in her.

When, on the packets of patent cereal foods, I see man with scythe and maid with sheaf drenched in a dawn-like radiance, I often wonder at the perfection of his mowing (despite no rack on his scythe) and of her binding, to have produced such a brilliant concord.

When it is the children's bed-time, Nora leaves me, to see that their 'wash-all-over' is something more than a noise^vof splashing, and to prepare supper. Walter's figure no longer adorns the roof of the hay-stack. Horses and cows are grazing peacefully together in the pasture. I mow a little farther, until

I reach a corner; then I hang my scythe in the hedge and go back and bind up what I have cut.

It is now eight-thirty. I sit on a tree-stump and think, if one could farm without having to employ labour, or just one person of intelligence and vision, then one's farming days would all be like this Saturday afternoon has been; and that would be very pleasant indeed. Each individual has his good points, yet in their togetherness they sometimes jangle, the old hands with the new, especially after long and arduous work. John says something as a joke which Walter does not see in that light: Walter's roundabout ways evoke John's derision: if the boss happens to be pre-occupied and does not smile gaily every time he passes the Italians, they think he is deeply offended with them for something, and he receives a tortuous little note at milking-time, which it must have cost them midnight labours to compose. The land-girl's mood is entirely dependent on how George looked and spoke the evening before. (Sometimes I feel like bribing George!) Among these the happy harvest badinage of my volunteer goes bouncing about like a ping-pong ball. I think, now he and I together, or Walter and I together, or John and I together, but all together, that's a different story.

'It was an advantage that my assistant had originally been trained for a factory, so he had no pre-conceived ideas about cows and farm work.' These words are quoted in a press interview with an exceptionally efficient dairy farmer. I ponder them as I sit on the tree-stump in the evening. They need pondering. In my experience, sometimes the Laboratory is right, occasionally Medieval England is right. The two might combine to produce real wisdom. But Medieval England is locked, bolted and barred into his Certainty, while to the Laboratory mind the very lilt of his sayings is as suspect as the smell of incense to a Puritan. It is for me to weigh and balance out as best I can, saying now to this one, 'Go ahead,' and now to that one; earning in doing so the low opinion of the other.

The machine—or human temperament? The rattle of gears or the clash of personalities: that is the choice for the farmer. Perhaps it will be the machine. Perhaps the farm worker will become a small yeoman again, his own master, by virtue of the machine. In that case the machine would not enslave but set free.

I harness my pony, and set him on the road to the foundry. There he stands among old tractor wheels and newly painted power machinery. He finds his surroundings totally inedible, and droops in boredom. As the manager of the foundry and I are looking for a part which I need for my horse-plough, the sound of aircraft of an ominously familiar type zooms in my ears. 'H'm,' says the manager, straightening and flapping the air, 'I took sixty pounds of honey from them the other day and they've been vicious ever since.' Brambles spring up round old machines: it is blackberry blossom the bees are seeking, and the blood of any who get in their way. 'Stanley,' calls the manager to a man in the yard, 'bring a five-eighth spanner here and take the hake from off this plough.' Stanley approaches, with a sort of air-raid victim look.

Next I load into my trap the new pole which is to hitch the binder to the tractor. It is painted a brilliant red: the paint is generous and not yet dry. The end of the pole rears out over the pony's head, who senses something unusual behind him, and is no longer bored and drooping, but alert and ready to dash home at one more hostile sound. An apprentice provides it by dropping a bunch of ploughshares. The next I know is that we are on the road for home, going hard. A hill ahead will moderate his pace, I reckon; but then the red pole shifts, and we fly up that hill. I should not mind the pace, if the road surface were safer. Even the by-road is as slippery as glass, by reason of aerodrome traffic.

In the narrowest part of the road, a six-wheeled transport confronts us, approaching rapidly with a whole aeroplane wing

upon it. It takes the longer to squeeze past us for the fact that the pony is trying to go backwards. But it is not just going past us: it stops, and the driver, quite unaware of any horse-crisis, leans out and asks me the way. I tell him, loud and quick. Another moment of this, and the binder pole will hit that horse a whack on the head, the trap is rocking so. The driver thanks me: with a buzz and a clang the transport moves forward, and the great silver monster of an aeroplane wing is drawn past. I think that wing must be a mile long.

Nearer home I stop and collect the washing. The stiff piece of paper which Mrs. S. has put over the top of the basket blows up, as usual with a loud crackle, and increases our speed by several miles an hour.

A mile from home I pass the grocer's van outside a cottage. It is a horse van, and the roundsman is mounting his seat as we go by. He is quick to take up the challenge of our pace. He'll not allow a little pony like that to get away from him. He cracks his whip to encourage his lanky gelding. My pony hears it, and the rattle of hoofs behind him. I have no intention of racing, but he has. He breaks into a gallop. So does his pursuer. The back curtains of the van are flapping out wildly in the wind.

The unusual clatter of horses' hoofs brings the village to its windows. The tiny pony flies along the street, the rhythm of his gallop beating out like a train at full speed. The lanky gelding pounds along behind. What about our groceries? the eyes question anxiously. We swing into our yard still just ahead, and the grocer turns his van and goes back to pay the calls he has over-run.

By the time I have unloaded the binder pole it is rather less red than I am. Now we shall be able to hitch the binder to the tractor. I wonder if the horses begin to have an inkling that the tractor is their best friend. Do they wonder about the green beast that lives next to the stable in a loose-box which the colts used to inhabit, and eats nothing, and says nothing all night

long? But drinks a great deal, a queer-smelling drink. It is odd to be stopping at a petrol pump with a pony and trap to buy a can of petrol for ERT. Mr. R., the haulage proprietor, gives me as always a handful of philosophy along with my change. He steps over an imaginary electric fence in telling me of the amusing reactions of small pigs to that form of constraint.

I mow borders of the fields for the calves, and break my scythe stick that has already been broken once and bound with string. Walter fixes it to another less broken stick. He sharpens the land-girl's hedging hook with a piece of drain-pipe, she having forgotten to bring a stone out with her, as she is trimming a border where he is at plough on a corner of fallow.

Here on a drizzling day we drill turnips, walking up and down the field with four inches of mud added to the soles of our boots. The colts break out. We interrupt the drilling to chase them back again and fill the gap with thorns. (Mental note: order more barbed wire—hateful stuff, but indispensable after years of farming depression and loss of hedge-craftsmanship.)

For turnips you need to seize the opportunity of summer rain, and think yourself lucky to be getting wet as you take out the drill at four o'clock in the afternoon. It is seven-thirty when we finish drilling them: the overtime beet-hoers have departed. The colts break out again. Two stampeding colts are not a welcome escort to the home-coming of the drill at the end of a tiring day. Kitty signifies as much answering liveliness as can be expressed by twitching each ear alternately backwards and forwards. As soon as the drill is housed, we return and chase the colts over sticky fallow and roots, finishing up beside a far gate-way. That mischievous pony is the ring-leader. He pushes his way through a hedge, and then they enlarge the hole and follow. Walter sensibly remarks that the colts won't run far if we can but catch and hold the pony. So saying, he seizes him by the forelock and the nose. 'Now, you hold him, while I get the

halter over the filly. Don't let him go whatever you do.' I transfer my grip to his forelock and his nostrils, keeping them nipped, while Walter slips the halter over the filly's head. We lead them thus, with the other colt prancing along behind, down the road, praying, 'O Lord let no cars, timber-carts or dogs on holiday pass this way.'

My neighbour's horses are in a roadside meadow, and come and snortle over the hedge. Nothing but will-power keeps our lot under an illusion of restraint. We lead them into the home pasture, where there is a barbed-wire fence, and shut the gate on them. The rain is trickling in a rivulet down my spine. 'This will make the turnips grow,' we say.

Next we have a field of peas to cut. I suggest the grass-clipper. Walter votes for the scythe. 'The clipper'll run over half of 'em, they lie so flat.' Being an ass I give way. Walter would mow happily from St. Swithin's to Michaelmas. Our harvest volunteer comes too. We lay bottles of beer under one of the heaps of mown peas. By the time we have generated a strong thirst we have mown many more, and we search heap after heap to find our bottles. Our volunteer holds his scythe with resolution, all morning, all afternoon, and on into the evening until his scythe holds *him*. Walter advises him *to* knock off. He is unwilling, but admits that he fears that if he lifts his scythe again he may fall on his knees. Walter grins and goes on mowing.

The weather has been unsettled. Now, after one tremendous hailstorm it becomes fine again. Luckily my winter oats are cut or they would have gone down under the hail. Such occurrences, are recorded on my neighbour's stable door in chalk which never seems to rub out. For instance; 'April 7, 1920. Halestones big as sixpences.' 'March 15, 1916. King went through the village.' 'Oct. 10, 1918. 93 coomb of weat thrashed off 5 acres.' 'April 10, 1918. See first Swallow.'

We cut the rest of our corn with the tractor pulling the binder. For a time we go round and round the field with

pleasing monotony. The wheat stands stiff and level: the afternoon is hot and drowsy. The drone of the tractor, and a feeling of fullness due to chanking wheat kernels after a good dinner, makes me nod. I drive round in half a dream, until Walter bangs with a stick on a tin part of the binder (a shout of 'Woa' could not be heard), which is the signal to stop. Alternately the string breaks and the back chain flies off, disintegrating as it does so, and then we have to hunt for the links in the stubble. We put the black and greasy thing together again. Then thistles get under the canvas. We discover that, after all, one of the canvases has been put on the wrong way up. 'I somehow thought that wasn't right,' we both say, as though accusing the other of thinking it was right. No more is there Mr. Merry to tell some irrelevant story about a stoat or rat during these halts. As the day declines, first children from school, then men from work, come into the field. The good men and true set up sheaves while waiting for rabbits to bolt from the corn.

Again we have to stop, while I unchoke a jet of the tractor, taking the float chamber to bits, unscrewing tiny nuts and washers, with a weedy stubble waiting to hide them for ever if dropped. As I work I am aware of a pulsating air in my ears, and turn to find myself surrounded by the mouth-breathing faces of many youngsters as closely absorbed as I am in that float-chamber. 'I'm a tractor driver,' says the nearest in a proud treble. 'Your engine is starved of juice.' 'Quite right, Tommy, full marks,' I reply. Another voice breaks in—it is Sammy Handlock's: 'I reckon that there old whatcher-me-call-it what Mr. Whatsisname's got on his tractor . . .' he begins with characteristic lucidity; and then, 'Coo, there go a great old rabbit.'

'And who else here is a tractor-driver?' I ask.

'I'm going to be one when I leave school,' several answer in chorus.

'And who is going to be a horsekeeper?' There is silence.

Darkness finds us alone again in the field, Walter absorbed into the binder, trying by the light of matches to untangle string that has wound itself into a ball round a shaft. 'Cut it,' I tell him. He will not do that: it would be waste.

After that, silence, starlight: we take the horses down to the meadow where they spend the night and watch them for awhile, quiet-bodied.

Home to supper, and then—well, I suppose it is worth just going to bed before it is time to start milking the cows in the morning.

Next day we cut barley, and I put the land-girl on the tractor, and give myself the holiday of the pleasantly monotonous job of setting up sheaves. Two of her girl-friends arrive to see her, and they travel round on the tractor clasped together, talking through the noise. It looks like a joy-ride, with young boys also perched where they can find a foothold. I don't know whether to smile or frown on this merry-go-round. I suppose such a picture will appear in books two hundred years hence as typical of the joyful harvests of the days when it was Ford for Merrie England; and the derivation of Oxford may be ascribed to contrasted methods of cultivation.

The oats have stood (some sprawled, some fallen) three Sundays in the field. I survey my harvest gang. I appreciate Neapolitan bonhomie: the Laboratory mind is ingenious and inventive: the land-girl among sheaves is a picture to sell any breakfast cereal—but nobody can build a load like Mr. Winch. So this evening I say I will knock off a little earlier and go and see him. When eventually I get away, and knock on his cottage door, I am told that he is in bed. I fear the unseemliness of the hour will offend him. But the message is brought to me that he will come first thing to-morrow.

Mr. Winch arrives at an embarrassingly early hour, when everything is drenched in dew. I ask him, would he mind binding the corn that Walter mowed yesterday round the edge of

a field, while we milk? He starts ahead, and I go to see about a stack-bottom before going to the milking-shed. As soon as I get there Walter tells me, 'Your new man's gone again : he said it was too wet to tie up that wheat: he'd got his knees soaked already, and he was going home.'

I feared I had been tactless, and that I should see him no more. However I was pleased to see him pedalling slowly down the road again after breakfast, topped by a big, sun-browned old straw hat that was my best weather forecast. I went to meet him at the gate, prepared to accept a wiggling about that dew-drenched wheat. He dismounted and stood smouldering at me from under his hat. 'I'm not forced to do this, remember.'

'I know, Mr. Winch,' I hasten to assure him; 'I'm very grateful to you for coming. I appreciate your patriotism in coming back into harvest at your age, when you might be enjoying a well-earned rest.' (Though I know work is the breath of life to him.) I think this rather outdoes his own view of his case, which goes no further than 'I don't need the money' repeated at intervals. In imputing a patriotic motive, I am helped out by the daily press. It is something fresh, I think, for the old countryman to be credited with more than a parish loyalty. It is a shame to him to see good land let down, fields he has seen grow fifteen sacks to the acre; but more for the sake of the land than the people of, say, London.

We are here together to harvest the food for the people: I lay that on pretty thick whenever Mr. Winch shows signs of becoming restive. I use it for an extenuation of unskilled work, such as when my volunteer pitches up sheaves the wrong way round, and does not notice that Mr. Winch has to turn every one before laying it in place. I use it as an apology for the presumption of asking him to associate with amateur labour. He puts up with it fairly well. But sometimes I see a gathering thunder of intolerance of futile faulty effort, which the happy, unsuspecting chatter of my volunteer does nothing to mitigate.

Mr. Winch pays as much attention to his chatter as to the chaff which blows past his face at every forkful. The way the young man jumps about on the stack, I see, irritates him, and the excessive jerky effort he makes over every sheaf, sometimes missing the sheaf altogether, and stumbling backwards. Sometimes, horror, he hits Mr. Winch full across the head with a sheaf, knocking the great hat askew. Mr. Winch takes off his hat, looks at it, says nothing, and replaces it on his head. Mr. Winch is a thrifty man, the embodiment of tidiness. His hat, you notice, has been repaired in many places with stitches of binder twine: it is really a network of binder twine, but all so neatly done, that except for its tan the hat looks new. It is not his head but his hat he is anxious for under the bombardment.

I take him away into the field with me: it is the only thing to do: he and I go with tractor and wagon, while the others get what they can on the tumbril carts, the volunteer and the land-girl, John and Toni. Walter remains behind to prod and preen his stack, and coax it into the proper shape. Mr. Winch lets off steam. I take the recoil of all those blows administered by the sheaves of the unskilful.

'It's no use, you can't farm without good men,' he says. 'Mr. Camm now, he's got five good chaps that know how to set about a job. They'll soon be done harvest; and his neighbour's only got one more field to cut. Ah, master, you can't beat having plenty of help, and getting forrard with your work. I like working where they know how to do a job the right way. Another thing, master—they two great stacks you're putting side by side—I'd have spoken afore, only its not my business—wherever'll you put the straw when it comes to threshing 'em? You'll need five people on the straw stack. But there,' he concludes, 'that's your business, master, not mine.'

All this time I am pitching up sheaves hard, and Mr. Winch is building them high on the wagon. I see a tumbril-load of oat sheaves looking like Mr. Winch's hat after a sheaf has hit it;

with John sitting on top smiling with satisfaction, apparently quite unaware that one more jolt as the cart is led athwart the furrows will pitch the whole lot into the ditch. Mr. Winch sees too.

'I don't like tumbrils for harvest. I like working on a form where they have all wagons for harvest. I wouldn't never do a harvest with tumbrils. Now, on Mr. Camm's farm . . .'

'I know, Mr. Winch; but you see in war-time we've just got to do the best with what we've got.'

Phew! these sheaves are heavy: I have to lift up Mr. Winch with every one. But he is building a magnificent load. And there's one thing—flies can't make this horse restive. I shout 'Hold tight,' twice, loudly, and draw the load forward in low gear very gently, and stop it without a jerk. I am as careful of that old man as of a basket of eggs.

John's load has reached the stack by a miracle, and appears to lean on it. My volunteer does not trust himself to his load, which hangs backward and looks like lifting the horse into the air.

'You want good men to load tumbrils,' Mr. Winch remarks, viewing the general scene.

My volunteer has the sense to see that something is wrong; and stops and ropes the load again. I believe, with training, he would be the best man to work with after all. Mr. Winch says suddenly, 'Do you know? you've got a lovely bit of oats here,' in a tone that implies I am unaware of my luck. 'You've got twenty sacks to the acre. A pity to get them spoilt for want of proper help.'

I fork harder than ever, as dark clouds loom up and threaten and pass. Down at the stack they seem to be enjoying themselves hugely. Mr. Winch goes on building layer upon layer of sheaves,

'Time to top up now,' I say. 'Whenever you like,' he answers, I throw the ropes to him, taking care not to hit him with them. 'Which side?' he asks, meaning on which side

should the rope be pulled in order to rectify any leaning of the load. I look at the load from the back and from the front: it stands up straight as a house either way. 'To your right in front, and to your left at the back/ I cry, in order to be categorical. We rope the load: Mr. Winch has slid down from his height by one of the ropes. (How many old gentlemen of 76 would care to do that gymnastic?) I drive the load slowly stackwards. This is a pleasant interval, a rest to the body, free of admonitions. Except that I discover that an oak tree's boughs are in the way, and I have to make a detour, which shakes the load.

When I arrive at the stack, Mr. Winch says, 'When I was farming I used to make sure and lop all the trees along my cart-paths before harvest. You can't beat thinking ahead at this job.'

We find a hurried business going on of preparing a new stack-bottom of straw, while our load waits. Mr. Winch comments, 'You want to get all your hedge trimmings carted and tipped up ready for stack-bottoms where you want to have your stacks set. Why, two months ago, Mr. Camm's chaps were . . .'

'I know, but my hedge trimmings all went into land drains,' I reply, a bit nettled. Nevertheless, Mr. Winch has laid upon that wagon as much as the others could have put on three tumbril carts.

A tumbril load is also waiting to be unloaded at the new stack. Tumbril and wagon stand on either side of it. Mr. Winch begins to unload the wagon. John signs to the land-girl on the tumbril to start too. He and Toni cope with the sheaves she unloads, while Walter and I handle those from the wagon. Suddenly Mr. Winch observes what is happening. 'Oh, I'm not unpitching 'em fast enough for you, ain't I?' he cries, and begins flinging off sheaves at an indignant speed. I have just time to sign to the land-girl to desist, before being buried alive in sheaves, like the rest of us on the stack. For a quarter of an hour we struggle to keep above the avalanche, and then, thank

heaven, there are no more sheaves on the wagon. Another layer or two and we should have succumbed. Mr. Winch sits on the wagon-rail, puffed and glaring. Hurriedly I go to start the tractor, which of course is unwilling to start, while Mr. Winch's presence looms like thunder, as much as to say, 'What are we waiting for?'

I see from afar Walter wrestling with the stack, while fresh loads are being gathered. It has developed a bulge early in its growth. Mr. Winch remarks as we approach it again, 'If there's not a prop put under that corner, it'll slip out.' The bulging corner is Walter's anxiety all day. He makes light of it; 'That'll be all right;' but every time the carts are away in the field he is to be seen trying to batter it in with his fork. Eventually we see that he has had to resort to a wooden prep, an open confession of failure. But he will not ascribe it to that furious unloading of sheaves from the wagon. As between Winch and Walter, deep calls to deep. No, it is due to faulty laying of the second course of sheaves by John, by me, by anyone; to the zealous skipping about of my volunteer on the edge of the stack. In short, to the indignity of being asked to work with amateur labour.

Some of the sheaves have thistles in them under their golden sheen; and the hot golden harvest hours have thistles in them too. It is master's privilege to receive these thorns into himself and be thankful they are buried there, while he smiles and thinks of some pleasantry to harmonise professional and volunteer, town and country. Especially when someone brings a load into collision with that corner of the stack that sticks out. Next, Kitty, finding it close and tempting, begins to tear it out a mouthful at a time. A four-stone weight is brought from the barn and laid on the ground away from the stack, and her leading-rein tied to that, to keep her head straight.

By the end of the day the stack seems to have settled: the corner is no longer a menace. There is a prospect of being able

to remove the prop in a day or two, which acts as a restorative to Walter's pride. He remembers, with many a cackle, stacks stacked by the unskilled or the unsober, which had to have props and stays galore. 'There was old Hardies, he used to work on the railway afore he took a little farm. He didn't know nothing about stacking; he went and put oat-sheaves on top of a lot of peas. He'd not had much help along with him on the stack, so the peas weren't properly trodden down. So soon as he'd got a load or two of oat-sheaves on them, why the pea-straw went down on one side like a concertina. So he put some props to that side. Then that went over on the other side. So he put some props to that too, and some long poles to keep the stack from falling into the ditch. The more oats he put on it, the worse that got: the corners began to slip out, then the sides again. He had to stop putting any more sheaves on and make some sort of a roof of straw. He put some more poles against it that night, and by the next morning it wanted a few more. "Coo," he say, "the thing look like a blasted centipede." '

Mr. Winch shakes his head. 'What's the good of such a-meddling with farming? They only grow a bit of good corn in the field to spoil it in the stack. Farming's no trade for any but what's been brought up to it. That fare wicked to me to see good corn spoilt.' He looks about him at the prospective moral iniquity of some of our gang. He fastens the land-girl with his gaze. 'I go past the spinney last night, and there's a soldier with a gal.' (Her young man isn't a soldier.) 'And what do I see?' We look vacant. 'And what do I see?' he reiterates. The phrase becomes a safety-valve.

We are working at full stretch now: the days follow one another hot and clear, but who knows when the weather may break? It is like a run of luck at a gaming table: summer weather gives point to the phrase, 'farming is a gamble': it is now that you really feel it is. We do not even worry at the milk 'shrinking'. Let it shrink: get them milked and out into the

aftermath, so that the carting of corn may go forward. The aftermath of the Long Meadow, which has a reputation for butter, is like rough grey fur. 'That'll fill them if that don't do nothing else.' The words handed down by Walter's father now have an almost comforting ring.

When our stack grows high, our volunteer's conversation dies away, and a tenseness comes over him. He works tight-lipped, and no longer jumps about on the sheaves, but stands as though rooted. He has a bad head for heights, and at last confesses that he will have to get down. I then realise what a struggle has been going on in him.

The stack now is narrowing to the top of the roof: it slopes sharply away behind him and in front. This young man is much more athletic than Walter, could beat him easily in running, jumping, swimming. Yet there Walter stands on that ridge, leaning forward over the eaves with only the support of his fork-stick between him and a headlong fall. Sheaves are his element; his feet are familiar with their mattress-like surface. He looks as at home up there as a gargoyle peering out from a belfry corner.

The person in the 'bully-hole' half-way up the stack, plants his fork and says, 'Now you put your foot on that to climb down.' Our volunteer, who has looked askance at the tip of our longest ladder just showing over the top of the eaves, turns himself backward to us, and begins groping with his right foot for the support of that planted fork-stick. The blind, frantic searching of that boot; while the young man—he must be praying! The person in the bully-hole grasps it by the heel, suddenly, and causes the youth's hand to grip the slippery stack-roof convulsively. I, too, have known that sudden gripping of my heel in similar case; and it feels as though you were going to be dragged to the ground. The pull is to lower the boot two inches, but the victim cannot see the fork-stick so close **under** his instep, and **feels he** is being dragged into space.

Anyone may be liable to this sudden, petrifying fear of height: there is nothing he can do about it. But when he feels the fork-stick under his foot, his whole body relaxes. Another fork, the unloader-of-the-wagon's, is planted a little lower for his other foot. Then he is in the 'bully-hole': a short step down to the 'wagon-load'; thence the short ladder gets him to the ground. He is himself again, but ashamed now to be idle while .we work. So I ask him to go and mow some clover with a scythe, hoping there may be time between now and dark to cart it for the cows. I realise, when he has readily assented and gone to it, that he has probably never handled a scythe before in his life. His figure is receding down the road with the scythe slung over his shoulder and the point of it unsuspectingly close to the seat of his trousers. But what a change, I think, from some modern country lads, whose reply to my request would have been, 'I ain't never mowed,' meaning, 'And I'm not going to.'

The idea must precede the act; and the idea is not in the country lad any longer, but it is in this young townsman. The idea, the spirit of the thing, its 'presence', which was impressed by father upon son, until there came a generation that refused it. Now the intelligent townsman, the young soldier, world-travelled, has embraced it; desiring to make some corner of England its shrine, and to serve it with his body, as the cleansing actions of a man taking a life-long bath from the blood and filth of mechanised war.

On Sunday I rest by the river with the family, in a friend's garden where a little lawn runs to the verge of the water and a glistening willow gives shade. Here formerly red-sailed wherries were unloaded of barley. The defunct industry of the quay-side with its malt-houses is given loving burial in a shroud of flowers. Climbing roses and clematis enwreath the old red walls of the empty buildings: hollyhocks stand brilliant sentinels by the dark doorways. This old-world haven of work

is transfigured into a heaven of rest; the river which always sparkled so in summer, smiling under the dwift play of swallows, now appears married to the garden.

It is alive with pleasure traffic: a sail glides by, a white sail, a wing of peace, expressing the majestic sweetness of the summer air. Why should a curve of canvas so fascinate the eye, and touch the sense like music? It breathes, it inspires the air, moving like a cloud. It is eternally watchable, with the lines of the yacht beneath, neat as a knife. It has the quality that is also in the sight of men rowing, or mowing; of wind-mills turning—of man in alliance with the forces of nature.

After the yacht there comes a boat rowed by three town-lads, very badly. One has the tiller, the other two miss the water by turns with one oar or the other, while the cox shouts instructions, and curses the clumsier of the two for being 'so dumb'. 'You're balmy, you are!' he shouts. The splashing continues: meanwhile they are overtaken by a boy of about ten, lithe as a sapling, handling a miniature pair of sculls as though they were part of his arms. He flicks them in and out of the water, and his narrow craft slips along: he pauses, and the drops sparkle down from the still blades. Then with a flick or two of the wrists, he circles the other boat as it wallows like a wounded crab, not amused but in a stare of wonder; then is away up the river again.

There is a graceful road bridge, and a railway bridge which is as straight and black as the goods train which rumbles over it with a fuss of steam and premonitory shrieks at the crossing gates. The names of collieries on the wagons transport the mind's eye all over England and Wales. Resting the body after moving so much corn on a two-pronged fork, one lives in the realm of kinetic values, naturally. One is vividly aware of the press of air on the canvas, so light an air, yet so massive in its effect on that surface; of the thrust of little muscle on the oar skilfully handled, in contrast to the belabouring of the

water to no purpose by the big boys lacking skill. And now the thrusting energy of coal, cutting right across the line of old water transport. You can see how uncompromising it is with any of Nature's windings; or the wakings, sinkings and veerings of the air; or of muscle applied in a telling instant.

The children have been fascinated by weeds waving under the tide of the river. 'They're like pussy's tail when he's watching a bird.' They drag some out, and still feel the wonder is theirs, although the weeds hang dank and still in their hands. They transfer their gaze with equal interest to grimy coal-trucks or bland white sails as they pass. And out in the street, 'Look at those lovely golden letters,' they cry at the sign of a patent bread advertised above the baker's shop. And at a placard for beer; 'Whatever is that great big monstrous animal?' 'It's a seal.' 'When shall we see a seal?' It is all a wonderland.

The Heart of Suffolk

WHEN we threshed after harvest, John had the idea that he could build the straw-stack. I had previously asked Mr. Winch to do it. 'Not if there's anyone else who's willing to,' he said. So I deferred to his age. John seemed eager to try. He had an idea that if he walked round and round backwards in building the stack, it would be all right. 'Hampshire fashion', he called it. Seeing that he had called his hoeing 'Wiltshire fashion', I was growing dubious of these 'foreign' fashions. However the day promised to be chaotic anyhow, so I said, 'all right, go ahead.'

It happened that the day on which the threshing machine arrived, was the day of a sale of cows I particularly wished to attend, at the other side of the county. I took the bit between my teeth, made what arrangements I could, and left them all

to get on with it. For the first ten miles I was worried, but after that the sight of Suffolk farm lands in late summer charmed my thoughts far above my own little affairs.

There was the thought that someone was caring for each of these fields: every one of them was some man's worry of love. Because nobody would touch farming for a moment, he would not spend one day at it, if he were not driven, even in spite of himself, by an overmastering élan and love. The toil is so continuous, the anxiety so great, that nobody would do it otherwise for less than a prime-minister's salary. Anyone who farms knows that the talk of parity with industrial conditions is moonshine, unless the price of food is to be on a par with the price of motor cars. The greatest mystery in agriculture is that in an industrial civilisation any free man is found to be engaged in it. Formerly, when a nation became imperial and plutocratic, farming became the job of slave-gangs. It may be so again, until the so-called civilisation perish.

So I said to myself, knowing all that was at stake in the world to-day: look at this little land, the blossoming of an infinite patience. Look at that farm-house, those round ricks so trim, that rich little valley, So quiet, so still, yet busy all day. Oh, God, if *this* should pass away . . . I would fight with my last breath that it should not.

Being myself a commercial farmer (who isn't?), I still affirm against all agricultural realists' that farming is a way of life. It is my way. It is the way of this land I passed through, the very heart of Suffolk. Walpole, Peasenhall (where they make the best corn drills), Framlingham, rich in monuments of Time, Earl Soham, Saxted Green (country of white windmills yet); Debenham where a regiment of old traction engines stands near the church, looking as though they'll bray forth tremendously from their fat funnels on the Day of Judgment. Are not traction engines the nineteenth-century's gargoyles? The twentieth-century's lack even grotesqueness. Tractors are just square

blocks of power. They moved over the land, not particularly noticeable, but changing the face of it in a way that was as old as the villages. I had been riding that whining thing to and fro over my stubble for days, and had a hungry eye now for the quiet stepping Suffolk horses where they went; and there was no lack of them that morning. Occasionally there would be more than one team in a field: two or even three teams. An added grace of counter-motion these gave, passing one another up and down their lands.

You see the finest Suffolk horses in this remote mid-Suffolk country. It was a holiday indeed to a modern farmer, to see these animals and their movements. For no farmer that I know, no true-bred Suffolk man, but hankers for the feel of the old plough, deep inside himself, and the sight of a matching pair ahead. Even though the tractor seat has taken the place of his chair in the chimney-corner; for that is now his evening seat, as he ploughs by moonlight.

On my way home that afternoon, I saw again these same horses resting now in meadows, grazing together. And their grace in rest was as great as their grace of power in work. The lines of their bodies flowed like the trees, like the wind wherever it wove a visible motion. Then I felt in a flash what was the root of our trouble, as we plough in the dawn, through dinner-hour (the tool-box our sandwich tin), and in the moonlight. The tractor never tires, only the man, and he does not count. He has to serve his source of power. Now to minister to a pair of horses who plough for you, is in a sense to repay one's debt to nature. It befits the dignity of a man. There is too the satisfaction, which I cannot really describe, of watching those horses feeding with which you have ploughed all day. To serve a tractor is quite another matter. After you have sat on the seat all day, gripping the wheel, you are almost welded to it, part of the machine.

Now the fact that horses have feelings, that they grow tired;

that they need food after work, not merely fuel before it, conditioned the former husbandman's day. It imposed an order of coming and going—from stable to field, from field to stable. There were set hours, and the working day on a corn farm had a certain ritual quality by reason of the passing to and fro of the teams, and of the men who tilled with them.

At a quarter past five the head horsekeeper came; at half past six all went out to plough, or to drill and harrow, as the case might be. At nine o'clock they came back to breakfast: at ten they went out to the field again. At a quarter to three they returned to the stable for dinner. At a quarter to four the horse-men returned from their dinners and spent the rest of the afternoon attending to their horses; feeding, grooming, fetching in straw and hay, and finally turning them out into the well-littered yard for the night, with racks filled with clover hay.

In addition, the materials wherewith the living horse-power is generated—oats and hay—themselves speak to the senses of smell and touch; even more intimately to the man who grew them. Fields and seasons are in the bin, and memories in the cutting of the stack. He shares something of the meal he gives his horses. Oil and petrol have no such range of interest, and their sources make no impression on the mind. For the countryman, they might not have been in existence till they were poured into the tanks from the lorry. The imaginative leap required to connect Iraq with Benfield St. George, even if valid, is as yet too difficult.

No, the modern work must shine alone in its own virtue; it has no sensible by-products. And the zest one has in mounting one's tractor early is simply 'Here is a fine dry day, and what a lot of earth we shall be able to turn before night.' Yes, there is a zest in ploughing when the earth is dry, and you are doing double good. But even that begets an impatience: one cannot get the fuelling and greasing done quickly enough; every few minutes delay is a furrow the less turned.

Not so with horses: the endurance of the horse is limited; although for short periods by devoted attention horses can be toned up to remarkable feats without over-fatigue. My neighbour used to put the first feed of the morning in the mangers overnight, and wake up at three-thirty a.m. and let the horses in from the yard, and then go to bed again for an hour. At four-thirty he would be up and giving them another bait, and from then he fed them at half-hourly intervals until it was time for them to start out to plough at six. They would do an acre a day after harvest regularly, and keep in great fettle, on oats, beans, and the best clover hay.

The passing of the horse has destroyed the order and patience of the day: it all swung to the rhythm of his gait. Now, in the place of it, are great chunks of chugging effort, and day-long, bruising detonation. Darkness descends: I can see no more. When at last the engine of my tractor ceases, instead of silence, I hear the distant throbbing of my neighbour's tractors, north, south, east and west. *They* are still doggedly at it.

Is this good farming? Yes. What our forefathers could not hope to do, we having the tools can by will-power achieve. Never before have we been able so to master the land, and dodge the weather. We break up our stubbles while the land is dry, and expose it to sun and air that is still summery. Half a fallow is achieved between one crop and another, weeds are kept down, the land is aerated and good crops result.

Is it life? As I see it, it is coping with an emergency: I can only say that. Yet I can say more; just this much: in a necessitous hour, is it not better to feed the hungry than to praise the beauty of horses? The end must over-ride the means.

But it results in longer, not less hours for the farmer. The loss is a loss of a limiting factor; the endurance of muscle. The day has lost its measure and its order. Achievement stands big in its place, and swells the farmer's breast; not vaingloriously, **for** he knows he is doing well by the land: he and his few

labourers do more than his grandfather could do with all his men and boys.

But when I speak of the passing of the horse, I exaggerate. Of course I exaggerate, and how easy it is to do so in that respect. Did I not see fields of horses that day I drove through mid-Suffolk? Are there not great and stirring sales of the Suffolk Horse Society at Ipswich, and lesser sales of horses in many market towns in spring and autumn?

Horses work on the farms in conjunction with the tractor. In what they do, muscle and motor are complementary. But the horse can no longer impose his order on the day, his pattern of coming and going. It is the order we lack, and there is discomfort in the lack.

Nevertheless, it will take more than the tractor to destroy the pattern of old England that this mid-Suffolk country still presents, presented to me that early autumn day; the imprint is too deep, the slow accretion of many home-keeping generations crowd too thick upon it to be swept away in a moment. There were evidences of loving care; the top-knot finish to a thatched rick, narrow strips of ploughing left for the horses to complete, so that the tractor wheels should not run on the newly turned furrows.

Our ancestors would not let even their horses walk on the ploughed land, but harnessed them in line to walk along the open furrows in finishing off their work. Without artificial manures, but by making composts of manure and earth, by paring banks and burning the turf, by burning the very clods of a fallow and spreading the ashes, they grew an average of 7 to 8 sacks of wheat, 8 or 9 of barley, 8 to 10 of beans, and 12 of oats to the acre. I am speaking of 100 years ago. Suffolk was then famous for her dairies. Three dairymaids and a boy looked after 40 cows. Red Poll cows they were, or the ancestor of the Red Poll, the Suffolk Dun, a true dairy type. They were spoken of, the Red Polls, by Arthur Young and others, as 'the little mon-

grel breed.' They gave 4 to 9 gallons of milk a day, say Arthur Young and others. That without the highly concentrated cakes and meals with which cows are boosted up to-day. The 'little mongrel breed' has now become pure and pedigree, with a Herd Book, and a Journal, and blood-tests and tuberculin tests and sales that are occasions of connoisseurship and homage. But as to giving 4 to 9 gallons of milk daily, how many commercial herds of this or any other breed, or mixture of breeds give that now?

What happened, I wonder, in the years between 1840 and 1940 to bring our yields of milk so low?

In corn, what have we gained? In beans we have lost. A good crop of beans is a rarity nowadays. In cereals we have gained perhaps two or three sacks an acre, for our work of mining and processing chemical manures. We must remember, when we speak of agricultural labour, that all that work, although it does not take place on the land, is still agricultural labour. It is the counterpart of the burning of clods.

I could not help thinking of these things as I passed through that Suffolk of the by-ways, a Suffolk that still is to all appearances a living illustration of that old book of mine called *The Agriculture of Suffolk* by William and Hugh Raynbird, published in 1849. I was surprised to find illustrations of combine drills in it, designed to sow the few forms of artificial fertiliser they then had, along with the corn. Also I found the very farm reported on, upon which I was a pupil in 1920. The labour it employed in the 1840's was 16 men, 8 boys and 8 women, the same practically as I remember in 1920, except for the women: about 6 persons per 100 acres. And I was to live to see that whole farm, under different management, employ 4 people in all and tumble into ruin.

Bring the people back to the land. But it will not be the old people and the old skill. Not Simmons, the stacker and thatcher; not Luke, the horsekeeper. Their knowledge died

with them. The blacksmith's knowledge is dying with him, and the wheelwright's with him, and the harness-maker's also.

A new people and a new knowledge ?

When I returned home at the end of that day, the threshing was done and the tackle had departed. In the middle of the yard stood a thing like a huge dumpling done up in a cloth, as though ready for the pot. It was the straw-stack, built 'Hampshire fashion' by my resourceful John walking round and round backwards. Good sweet oat-straw, cut early to be the better fodder. What had happened? Some sort of dispute, I gathered, between him and Walter as to how big the base should be. Having made a bottom, he added another yard to it, for fear that the straw would not all go on, which made the thing square; and in the end there was not enough straw to make a roof, and so they bundled the stack-cloth over the lot, and there it was, to be dealt with at some future date.

Whether the faulty estimate was John's or Walter's I could not determine. The stack was the object of many a jest and many a smile of the passer-by. The morning after the threshing Walter greeted John with, 'The bungalow's not let yet.' 'What bungalow?' asked John, then saw what he meant. The heap had sunk during the night, and become even more squat and flat.

At the cost of the labour of three men for half a day we managed to fake up some sort of roof, by pulling the loose straw from all round the sides. But still it looks queer, pinnacle-like, a shape of jest. And so it will be till the straw is consumed, a monument to theory before practice, a travesty brought to mind locally by the term 'Hampshire fashion'.

For me, though, all is redeemed by this one fact: the fellow was not afraid to try. He had the courage, all too rare, to accept the responsibility of failure. His effort fell flat, quite literally, but not his confidence. He has returned to his home in the

chalk country; but I should like to bet that when the farmer he next works for asks him, on the eve of threshing, can he build a straw-stack? he will reply, 'Yes, I'll build it Hampshire fashion.' And one day he'll succeed.

We have threshed the seed corn for next year; but still I have not told half of the business of that threshing-day, of how the promised gang of German prisoners did not turn up, and then when they did, the awful row that ensued because of Toni and Carlo, my Italians. Do I mean that the Germans and Italians fell foul of one another? Not at all; their behaviour was most 'correct'. The awful rumpus was between a Committee man and our men, because in passing he saw Germans and Italians working on the same job, a thing expressly forbidden. It was a thing which we, in our anxiety to get the job done, had overlooked. Oh no, it was not the aliens who nearly came to blows! All this in my absence.

But anyhow, peace descends at last, and we have threshed our seed corn. Not that we have finished harvest, by any means. The seed clover is not even cut yet, and after that there will be the sugar-beet to harvest, and the mangolds to clamp.

Between Yesterday Grid To-morrow

SAINT Luke's Summer; sweet, saintly weather it is. What a blessing on the busy days a clear blue sky can be. The ground quakes and opens where the beet-lifter runs, and the roots rise out of the mould clean and white: one almost begins to like the laborious things.

The seed clover, of course, has been the grand anxiety of the month. We took the tractor-pole off the grass-mower, and put

the horse-pole on and cut it with the horses, because the tractor wheels would have crushed out much of the precious seed. When one needs careful manipulation and finish, one reverts to horses. When it came to raking it into heaps for carting, even the horse-rake would have been too unkind, and we did it by hand. What days those were! Early mists, drenching dew, then sunshine. We spent one such morning putting that straw-stack to rights, itching to get at the seed clover, but unable to do so till the sun had dried the dew.

Michaelmas was made to look like midsummer, as we and our neighbours were everywhere in shirtsleeves raking with hay-rakes. The whole family came, Martin carrying his miniature hay-rake. But he grew impatient with it, yielded it to one of the girls, and grasped a full-sized one. With this he raked manfully all the afternoon. The object was to keep the wagon going, with two loading and two pitching, for which the family kept raking the swathes into heaps.

We had had some days of tricky weather since the clover had been cut. There had been a downpour every other day, wetting the stuff again just after it had dried from the previous one. Once I said, 'Our clover is done for now, I believe,' as the rain came teeming down yet again; and we resolutely put aside those secret calculations of six sacks of seed at thirty pounds a sack. Just when we had abandoned hope, the sky had mercy. We found the clover seed was unharmed, and worked like niggers. We could hardly get more than two wagon loads a day, try as we would, between the drying of the dew and early dewfall at dusk. At last, on a Saturday, I breathed to myself a wish—or a prayer—or a determination—'We'll clear the field to-day.'

Walter said, 'If you rake that first which is dry now, but lies all morning in the shade of those trees—then, if we have to leave any . . .'

'We won't leave any,' I said, and my will communicated itself to his, and he understood.

Toni said 'More—more—' building the tallest load of his life. 'That's quite enough,' conveyed Kitty's long back legs as she stretched them out at the word 'Gee' till her haunches wrinkled. If we could unload this load, get another and let it stand on the wagon, then the rest might go on the cart. So the family raked and raked. The two girls went off towards a well-known blackberry hedge, but returned and raked again. Then, being tired, they sat chatting of fairy possibilities. They were a decoration to the field of black clover in blood-red sunlight. They put a fresh spirit in us; their chatter was better than running brooks. I was in a stupor of raking: my arms did not know what they did. I only knew that I did it, because I saw myself doing it. Martin was grim and grand, growling angrily at his mother who was insisting on his going home with them to tea-supper.

But the raking was nearly done—was done. We heard the empty cart come rattling over the rough ground towards us. We left the men to load it, whether it would all go on now hardly caring. If not all, then all but. The windows of the house glowed. I groped and peered, skep in hand, filling the cows' mangers while they mooed indignantly at the gate. 'Late—late—.' 'Shut up: you have nothing to do all day but have patience—and you can't have that.' The clean, empty, echoing cowshed was like a new phase of a dream. Let the parson's sermon be never so long to-morrow, I should bless him for it, sitting with eyes glazed, while '. . . and our last thought for to-night' spun itself out into a hazy cocoon of virtue in which glowed (if a black stack can glow) a steep-roofed stack of seed clover.

A stack looks as permanent as a windmill, though it is **only** built and thatched to last for a month or two. When watching or helping with thatching, I always wonder at the tradition of permanent care for temporary ends which it typifies. It is as

true to nature as the flowers which are brilliantly arrayed for a day or two. It is the sort of care over short-lived things that people usually only give to festival days, the hanging of bunting or paper-chains, the making of garlands and firework set-pieces.

So it comes to me while I am drawing out the straw for thatching, that there must be a touch of that child-like pleasure in traditional farming. To do a thing to be serviceable must be to do it well: ploughing must be near-perfect or the ground is not all cut: a thatched rick must look all of a piece whether it is to last months or years; even the clipping of the thatch at the eaves must be done in one way rather than another, or rain is led down the side of the stack.

So there comes to be a pleasure in a neat thatch, and a flourish of ornament is set up; a cock or a 'dolly' over the eaves, as much as to say, 'I'm not afraid of attracting your attention to *my* work.' For of course a man would not look only at the ornament, but survey the whole work.

So much art for a month or two. But then, so much for Christmas Day, so much (once) for May Day. There must be a seed of festivity in the mould of toil; there must be a kind of simmering of pleasure, as of one humming a song as he works. There must be, quite authentically, something festal woven into the very earnest and often quite grim action and endurance of the land-worker. There is no other trade, craft or facture that I know of, whose productive phases are each a creation and so short-lived, excepting the housewife's; and these two crafts are of one flesh. Affectionate, effective, whole and homely: the illustration of it is that Suffolk scene I spoke of. If that should be erased in favour of a sort of aerodrome-scape, then farming will be finished in this country, whatever name men give their land-busting.

Thatching looks a peaceful occupation; and so it is; but it is also hard work. The thatcher's mate should always have a wet

shirt, is a saying of agriculture ; not meaning by that so much that he should sweat, as that the bundles of straw (called yelms) which he prepares, should be so wet that they soak his shirt as he carries them up the ladder on his back. Of course if they are wet they are also heavy; but you can't make thatch with dry straw: it won't 'pull' properly, it won't lie close and flat, any more than tousled hair can be made to lie down except by wetting or oiling it, however hard you brush it. Thatching is somewhat the same process: you must regard a thatched roof as a tiled roof; only the tiles are straw tiles, and you should not see where they overlap or join. If you are a 'drawer' your job is to make, from a tipped-down heap of straw, flat 'tiles' of straw, the straws lying close and parallel. Not, most certainly not, a 'sow's bed', which denotes the sort of paillasse a sow on the eve of pigging prepares for herself, running to and fro with mouthfuls of straw, grunting and snorting with self-importance; the result of all this frenzied labour being a small untidy heap. A 'hog's trough' denotes a piece of bad ploughing: so the pig department of the farm provides a glossary of opprobrium.

Usually it blows half a gale when you want to do some thatching; but on this occasion the weather is warm and calm and bright. Tea under the stack, couched in the straw which has been combed out from the thatch (dry again by now) is peaceful, seeing that Walter does not smoke, and there is nobody with us who is itching to light a cigarette, on whom I must keep a watchful eye. It is extraordinary how the mania for smoking seems to compel otherwise careful folk to sit puffing among straw. They have only to sit down among it, to begin feeling in their pockets for fags and matches. So that at harvest-time the master cannot even relax for elevenses or fourses.

Yes, what work there is in thatching. After you have carted your corn, and built the sheaves, and all is square and well set up, and the roof steep and sharp-ridged—why then you must have thatching stakes—brooches, they call them—and loads of

the best straw, and the water-cart drawn up handy full of water, and plenty of twine wound on stakes like bobbins, and so on and so forth; before you can start to make your corn safe from the weather.

Does wheat not pay to grow? Possibly not. Certainly not, the old farmers would say, seeing that the economic limit of Weekly wages was formerly considered to be the price of a sack of wheat per man. The price of wheat is hardly half a man's weekly wage now, and the wheat acreage payment has been halved. So then, say you don't grow it? So then, come harvest, what are you going to do for thatching straw? The old farming was so interlocked, that to omit one crop would upset the whole organism.

Thus must the modern farmer scratch his head and consider.

Do what you will, there are never enough thatching stakes. I collect them after threshing days, and make bundles of them and hoard them away. And yet, in a year's time, where have they gone? They dwindle: by some inevitable process, they dwindle. A thatching stake is such a handy thing to take to drive a cow or a pig. By mid-winter, when everything is soaked, a bundle of thatching stakes stored away in the dry is such perfect kindling wood. By heaven, let me catch him who allows such a thought even to float through his mind! From the thought to the act is but a small step. Somebody burned a whole supply of my thatching stakes one winter—to melt some glue or tar, or to get up steam in a steam engine, or to cook a dinner. Yes, I more than suspect an Italian labour gang that came to hedge and ditch. They were adept at making fires, and toasting bread and themselves and parley-voing and chanting operatic airs. And making a stew or a brew in a billy-can. And haunting the yards to see what could contribute to that pot; the tips of cattle-kale from the heap by the cowshed. Poor devils, cast up in a strange land far from home, what should they have to sing about? Or for that matter, any longer **to talk about? But** the brew kept them interested, for sometimes they

Between Yesterday and To-morrow 157 had not enough tools to go round. A coats cloaking their shoulders, around the innumerable fires, an army armed with bills and spades bivouacked in a foreign field. Walter was worried to death by these spendthrift fires, and rushed to and fro trying to load the wood on a cart as fast as it was cut and bring it home, actually seizing brands from the burning, good boughs of oak and thorn which a true country fellow would never dream of burning on the field, but store to heat the oven.

I did not so much grudge them their fires, though waste is barbarous. However, an age so spendthrift as ours of every natural resource exacts its sacrifice even in remote corners. But I could not forgive them those thatching stakes. I did not discover the loss until the next summer, but then I felt like a jeweller after a smash-and-grab raid. Had I not been robbed of two hundred 'brooches'?

So it was necessary to go and cut some more before the thatching could start. But who can be spared to cut thatching stakes at harvest, when so much else is at stake? A wet day, though, the aftermath of a storm, when harvest must pause—is not that an opportunity? No, for then, you see, the woods are wet too, and every stroke of the bill-hook brings a soaking shower upon a man's head.

It so happens sometimes that benefit is the fruit of misunderstanding. There came a time during the early summer when my wife (who is patient) said, 'The peas in our garden really must have sticks by the end of this week.' I knew that her ultimatum was overdue: the peas should have been stuck (sticked?) about the beginning of the week before. 'It shall be done,' I promised, and shutting my eyes to three or four urgent jobs claiming them, said to Toni and Carlo, 'Go up into the wood and cut pea-sticks. '

'But wait,' I added, 'do you know what I mean—pea-sticks?' We stood by the peas in the garden, with their already long,

groping, growing-disappointed tendrils. 'Yes, yes, we understand.' Carlo was all smiles. I explained, sticks with branches for the peas to catch and climb. I made the motions of catching and climbing, and Toni nodded and clawed the air too, and said, 'For the forage to go up; yes, yes.' I showed them a branch of a faggot: 'Like this,' I said. They grinned; and later I realised that one should never use the word 'like' to an Italian, but 'similar', which he can understand from his own language. 'Like' he always associates with love. I thought, no wonder they grinned at my idea of them being enamoured of that little bit of brushwood.

Well, obviously they were not, for when at the end of the day they reappeared with Kitty and the cart out of the wood, they came bringing a load of long, thin wands devoid of any side-shoots whatever. The side-shoots had all been very carefully trimmed off, at much expense of time and labour. We had to make them do, with the aid of string; but the peas never really took to them. Later, however, I pulled them up, cut them in halves and sharpened the ends, and there were my thatching stakes.

Daisy's eye has been the recurrent anxiety of the last few days. Why am I late for breakfast? Daisy's eye. Why, next day, am I late for tea? Daisy's eye, in which an oat flight (piece of oat-chaff) is embedded. Every day we halter her and tie her close to the gate of the yard, and try to wipe the oat flight out of her eye. She has a remarkable way of making her eyeball disappear. She has several eyelids (a cow, I believe, has three), eyelid beneath eyelid. When these are successively lifted, the eye just is not there: she has turned it down so that it must be looking into her throat. At moments the eye appears and looks at us with fear and reproach, but before we can get the corner of the handkerchief to it, it has gone again, rotated inwards, oat flight and all.

On the third day, a pale film is forming over the eye, which is a danger sign to me; for it is the first stage of blindness. So I ring up the vet., who comes next day before breakfast. By now Daisy objects strongly to the gate, so strongly that in saving the eye we are likely to lose the gate. But I don't grudge that. But how, I wonder, is the vet. going to control that nimble eyeball? Very simply: it took him just five minutes. First he squeezed between the closed eyelids a cocaine paste; told me a story for four and a half minutes while it took effect, then put his finger on the temporarily de-sensitised eyeball and wiped off the oat flight. So simple, when you know how. To me the moral of that is, call in the vet. first and not last, even for an oat flight.

Finally, to clear off the film, he blew a white powder over the eye. Early morning tableau: I gripping Daisy's horns like handlebars, vet. poising white powder in a paper before the eye to blow it in, milk-lorry man shouting for the milk.

The only stack not thatched is the seed-clover stack, which is covered with a cloth, awaiting the machine to thresh it out. Clover seed is making a good price, so everybody is wanting that machine, called a huller. We hear of it circumstantially as being located on this or that farm somewhere in the hinterland, progressing slowly in this direction.

Meanwhile we go ahead with the carting of the sugar-beet. The sugar-beet lifter is beneficial as a sub-soiler when the land is dry. It opens the earth under the long roots. The ground is so hard that the horses can hardly pull it: once again we resort to the tractor, which pulls it steadily, easily. There is just room enough for the wheels between the rows. Once again the horses stand idle, while the lifting and topping of the beet goes on. Then we cart them, and the horses are in full work again. It is these bouts of work followed by bouts of idleness that are so **bad** for horses: they are never at regular work nowadays. The

opening of the land by the lifter makes heavy going of it for the horses with the carts.

Meanwhile, the field from which we carted the seed clover on Saturday, is ploughed on Monday and Tuesday, rolled and harrowed twice on Thursday, cultivated, rolled, harrowed again, and within ten days of the clover being carted it has been sown with winter oats and the oats harrowed in. All this has been done by the tractor when the ground would have been too hard for my two horses to have begun to plough it. The next field, a wheat stubble destined for beans, I plough twice and roll and harrow: another field is also ploughed twice, cultivated four times: another field ploughed, and cultivated twice and sown with wheat. The tractor, which cut and carted the harvest, has done all this before Michaelmas. The corn being sown while the land is still warm, springs up quickly and establishes itself. When this clay land grows cold and wet, a proportion of the valuable seed corn rots or is eaten by vermin, before it can die naturally into the life of a new plant.

If the tractor is a contribution of the devil to agriculture, breaking up the beautiful rhythm of horse-culture in the fields, then at least we must give the devil his due.

Yet, I am not so sure of the diabolism: some neat little multi-purpose machine may yet re-establish the small-holder on the land. A new peasantry (part-time cultivator?) may be the result of tractor power.

I have done all this, with occasional help from Toni, while the others have been carting the beet and mangolds. There is an undeniable beauty in getting things done while the weather is propitious.

Michaelmas brings its changes. I have a new helper come to the cottage which old Mr. Merry inhabited. Houses, like seeds of corn, know resurrection. Trees, bushes, growth of every kind closed round the house in which the old couple lived their declining years. Now the scythe and bill-hook have been

at work. The house stands bare to the sun; the linen line is up (symbol of occupation), and washing flutters in the breeze. There are children's voices.

It is time for the Italians to return to their camp. Soon, I tell them, they will be repatriated to Italy: camp is the first step. All the same, when I tell them that they must return to camp before Christmas, because the Ministry of Agriculture has increased the charge for their labour to a sum I can no longer afford, Toni looks at the ground in silence, while Carlo bursts into tears and snatches Toni's handkerchief to wipe his eyes.

The next few days are not cheerful. The Italian boys have been comfortable here: they have grown to like us, and we to like them. But the burden of providing for four extra country workers in the house, besides husband and children, has been no light one for my wife under war conditions. Breakfasts have been from six-thirty to eight-thirty, dinners for as many as fourteen on occasion, evening meals from five-thirty to eight. Washing-up unlimited.

To be just the family again will be the visible sign of peace, whose only emblem so far is a small Union Jack stuck over the porch on VE-day, which has already faded to the colour of a dish-rag.

To gather together the home—the homes: to re-integrate, re-group, resurrect. This spiritual atomic fissure took place on a vast scale, before a mushroom-shaped cloud appeared over Hiroshima.

The implication of Carlo's suddenly bursting into tears is disturbing. While we here are celebrating 'home' again, there are exiles who have lost the desire to return, who have lost their native sense. Where, after tribulation, they have found a comfortable corner, their greatest sorrow is to be moved out of it.

Carlo being young and single wanted nothing but the good English food and friendship, with liberty to tell you what a wonderful place Italy was—all wine and holiday.

'Yes,' said an officer of my acquaintance, who had fought there and tried to administrate; 'If only they'd make less of their perpetual vino, and grow some food for themselves instead . . .'

Even Toni, with a family and farm which he had not seen for six years, looked sombre at the idea of shifting even one step nearer his native land. He has often spoken warmly of it, but it has become as a dream he has dreamed three nights running. Occasional letters have been full of the high price of clothing and farm labour there. His ambition is no longer for Italy, but for a farm in South Africa, where black labour is plentiful and cheap. Vision of Toni as a little white overlord!

There must be thousands, millions, like these two, who have lost the polarity of their birth, sifting about like grains of multi-coloured sand. One day this vast seething sediment of war will settle, will become a Europe of 'Europeans'.

The English, however, are different. The longer and farther they are away, the more tenaciously they cling to the familiar hill, valley or street. I met a man who had returned to England from overseas after an absence of forty years, and he was amazed that we were not conscious every moment of every day of the privilege of walking in our richly traditional land.

This strong attachment to home must have a permanent value in the world of to-morrow, as it has had in the past. It is a peaceful attachment, not a blood-and-soil mysticism. Is there a sort of psychic magnetic pole in this irregular little bit of land sticking up out of the sea between the New World and the Old?

I thought, to-day, how the family and one small farm fill our thoughts from waking to sleeping. Yet the farm occupies merely a moment of a traveller's time. What a concentration of concern there is over all the lands and cities of this island, and what an anomalously impersonal thing 'government' is by contrast. It will be superseded, surely, by something more personal, an intensification of the personal concern, not a de-

naturing of ourselves from it, which is present politics. It should be as personal an affair as the old heraldic rule of kings was: but adult in conception, a fusion and sharing, not egotism splendidly strutting.

'On Saturday morning at ten o'clock,' I said to the Italians, 'we will start for camp.'

At five minutes to ten Carlo still had not returned from saying various farewells. Their last requests had been for me to purchase for them each a bottle of their beloved 'violet oil' for the hair. They left their billet beautifully clean and tidy, all the utensils shining; likewise the bicycles which we had lent them.

They kissed Martin, made sad little speeches of gratitude to Nora in broken English; and so farewell.

If only a common personal contact could be substituted for this damned press patriotism, all over the world . . .

Now, in place of the Italians, there are gangs of German prisoners at work pulling the sugar-beet. They have worked so well that all the beet is standing in heaps at the roadsides: it is ready before the factories can deal with it. Last year, the position was just the reverse.

The country folk do not seem to connect the men working in the beet with what is going on in Nuremberg and elsewhere in Germany; with the horror films and war-guilt trials. That they work well and willingly, hardly seem to have enough food for the work they do, and make beautiful little toys for the labourers' children out of oddments of wood—these are the local impressions of them. In fact, to take my threshing day as a pointer, there is a working respect growing up, expressed in the repeated local phrase, 'They can't be all bad; 'tisn't likely.' Whether this ought to be so or not, is not my concern. I record simply that as the fruit of daily personal contacts between German prisoners and English farmers and labourers, it is so. These contacts may become a contribution to history quite outside

the scope of the authorities concerned with the emergency of the beet harvest.

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And so we come round towards winter again. The men who worked with bare arms in the sun among corn and clove'r, are now muffled in coats and leather gloves, slashing at hedges.

I walk round and view my farm again; standing in a drizzle and gazing into the future—of the farm and of farming.

Barley prices look like falling next year, owing to increased production, since wheat has ceased officially to be a priority; the acreage payment having been halved, and no direction to farmers to grow a stipulated amount having been issued by the Committees this year. Is the world suddenly well-off for wheat, or has somebody blundered?

I look at all this land and think, what is it to grow? Milk, meat and sugar. Green peas, beans, cabbages, carrots? No, not carrots. A wise friend advised, 'Stick to crops that grow *on* the ground; it makes all the difference at picking-time.' Another has made a hundred pounds an acre out of black-currants. For how long? That is the question; for how long will this or that pay for labour at four pounds a week? Milk is the only sure thing.

I go into the field where my young heifers are, and stand looking at them. Does it all depend on you, and you, and you? 'Me too, perhaps/ I feel a tap on my boot (which was lately in the corn bin), and look down to see a pullet cocking her eye at me. Yes, eggs—surely they will want new-laid eggs. They'll want anything, of course, if only it can be produced cheaply enough. That is the crux of it all. That means machinery. But what machinery? How much? Machinery is still largely experimental; and there comes a point, fairly soon reached on a smallish farm, when the cure is as bad as the complaint: i.e. over-capitalisation is as bad as the heavy wages bill. The same

labour must produce more food; that is the basis of re-organisation. Wheat brings in £20 an acre at the outside, barley £2£ to £30. £40 is needed, and a minimum of £go per month for milk. Sugar-beet should produce the £40, so should canning peas; and on balance certain market garden crops that are within the general farmer's capacity.

But—for how long? When the East produces and exports cane sugar again, shall we continue with a subsidised sugar-beet industry in England? Farming ought to stand on its own legs, even if the trousers should be a bit ragged.

More of my land is down to fodder crops; and more young leys are under this year's barley. I do not see how the nation can have too much milk. I should say, rather, I do not see how the nation can have too much clean, tuberculin-free, high-butter-fat-content milk. And that takes some producing. That is a far cry from cows browsing and milkmaids tripping forth. I have an old picture with the title *Bringing Home the Milk*. A milkmaid is walking along a field path with a pitcher on her shoulder, the neck of which is stoppered with a bunch of grass!

To produce milk is cheap and easy. To produce clean milk from those same cows takes twice as long and twice the care. Clean milk is like the mirage of the desert: it is always on your horizon: because as your product improves, your own standard grows higher.

'And now more pigs.' This is the title of a Ministry of Agriculture 'memo.' for farmers, published in agricultural journals. The operative word is 'now', as though producing pigs were like nailing up packing-cases. Pigs, yes, but all that is necessary is for a trade deal to be put through with Denmark, say, for bacon to pay for coal, and the official memo, will disappear from the page, and the farmer will be left holding the baby—pigs.

Henderson, who wrote *The Farming Ladder*, says it is a miserable policy for the British farmer to stand waiting to know what

the government is going to do for him: he must get down to it and compete with the rest of the world in producing good food cheaply. That is sense. There is, however, one flaw in it. Though I believe that we with our fertile English soil can produce food as cheaply as any overseas farmer who enjoys a comparable standard of living, the English farmer *cannot* compete with dumped food whose export has been subsidised by overseas governments. Obviously not, because the subsidy can be manipulated increasingly to his disadvantage. So the British farmer *must* look to his government for the basic favour of fair play. Will the city-elected government of this island afford it?

By now in my walk round I have come to the 'roughs', some of which, reclaimed, have grown a good crop of wheat; others of which still await reclamation. This should have been done during the war, but was not, on account of unlocated anti-personnel bombs said to have been dropped among the undergrowth. Will it now be done? Six acres here, for instance, of good English land gone to thorn and briar.

Oh well; a bird sings, and I see young rabbits at play in a clearing. 'Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet.' Why not? The hawthorn is beautiful in spring, the thicket is full of nightingales; and the wet, sour ground grows purple orchises. Why this mad race for production, yet more production, ever narrower efficiency, until every gesture is assessed in terms of output per man-hour?

And yet again, there is a force of gravity in active man, like that which compels water to seek the easiest way down to the sea. Man has always gone to work on the basis of a straight line being the shortest distance between two points. All the beautiful, rhythmic motions of skilled hand labour are the sum of bodily experience in that job which has found the easiest way. The wheel was invented under the same compulsion, and the ox put to the plough, and later the horse to replace the ox, the

horse being quicker and the plough having become less cumbersome.

Sometimes one says to oneself concerning the future, 'Jog along, as many others do: reduce your labour, and don't worry to see the hedges grow up a bit, and weeds among the roots. Then*, though your crops may be mediocre, you will not be put to much expense over them.' Keep down your expenses, then becomes the motto, rather than keep up your production. But better, increase your production per acre to counter a fall in prices. Grow eighteen sacks of wheat to an acre instead of ten. Limit your acreage rather than your output. Yes, that is the only basis I can work on. I would rather give it up than let it slide.

Therefore manure: therefore meat. Faith therefore that the Englishman will relish his prime cut of good roast beef again. More, that the man who needs it will be able to afford it; not the city broker, the rich gourmand, but the miner, the docker, and those who wear away sinew in a struggle with the elements.

If bodily muscle will be wanted in the future? With the release of atomic energy we seem to have entered into the Book of Revelation. Matter is transmuted in a terrible flash; the same maybe that Moses sheltered in a cleft of rock to look upon, the backward parts of God. To have undone one grain of the living God is a devastating act. Are the mild-faced scientists featured in the press—so apologetic-looking—are these the horsemen of the Apocalypse? And we—have we forsaken the way of faith, and spent generations in alchemists' day-dreams, and finally five hundred million pounds to achieve what Christ bade us do in a moment of prayer? Christ healed a blind man in the moment it takes us to wipe out a city. He bade men by faith remove mountains, if they so wished; but better heal the sick, comfort the afflicted and transmute wrath into love. To transmute the orderly microcosm of atom into raging chaos is as nothing compared to the transforming of chaos into love.

Love is the element that we really annihilate: it is the cohesive force of the cosmos, and in its motion sings. The atom is an angel, and linked, they are that living coronal blessing divine birth, which Botticelli's vision translated for simple men. It is the core of life that we have shattered. First, and perhaps most terribly, in our souls, and now in bodily fact.

And aren't we sick of it all? I mean, the common man; the fellow who wants a roof over his head, a wife in his arms, and a child to dandle on his knee. And would like to get into a way of life that makes sense, yet wanders in a bemusement of the press.

It is odd how we seek the living God with electrical appliances and not with the dynamism of our being. We switch on radio, we gaze at television, yet refuse to believe that God can speak to a man in his soul. Or that he is a child of God. A *child* of God. Think back to your own childhood: 'the orient and immortal wheat': 'Thy rod and Thy staff.' . . . There is no achieving the undying radiation of a few words by bombarding atomic nuclei. What my childhood was, my manhood should be, only with my hand stretched out to my heavenly, in place of my earthly father. The instinctive action of a child who puts its hand out at a moment of danger, trusting that the parent's will move to meet it. Of this, if I have fallen into doubt, some fragment of carving or old tracery is ample confirmation.

Heavens, the power that is at hand, and we fear it; and positively chase after destruction because we fear it less than Christ. Christ, and the word of God we fear most. We fear to strip our pride before him: we would lose body and soul before we would lose face. The power comes to me when I am not me; when I cease to be my own little dynamo, and become a river of God. This is easy once I cease to struggle. It is easy to save a drowning man once he stops struggling. But it is not easy for him to stop struggling. It is no easier for a self-breather, self-inspirer, self-expirer, to drown in God.

Well, there it is. I must even stop saying this is good and that is bad. I know nothing. I have two horses and a tractor. I have an old barn of oak and pantiles, and a new tractor-shed of corrugated iron, and a cowshed of concrete. I have a wagon that is one hundred years old and a tractor-trailer that is one year "bid: these bring in a harvest of sheaves that are almost as old as time. I use superphosphate and a limited amount of synthetic nitrogen, but I turn all my straw into farmyard manure with cows and bullocks. I have a wooden-beam horse plough and a modern tractor plough. I milk by hand, but have some of my cows artificially inseminated, and get some fine vigorous calves thereby.

All these things, ancient and modern, are married into the work of the farm. I use them equally, and with equal mind. If you ask me which is best I cannot tell you. It is easy enough to lay down the law, to take up an attitude—horse power or mechanisation. You may notice some apparent contradictions in this story of our transitional farming of to-day. If that is so, it is because one appreciates the good points of whatever one is at the moment using. To say outright, this is beautiful and good; that is ugly and bad, would be too slick for truth. (It might be said that the milking machine more nearly imitates the suck of a calf than the human hand, and is therefore less unnatural.) The truth is, that it all depends on human nature; and to tackle the problem of power anywhere but at its source is to burke the issue. The greater the power, the more constant the prayer; that is a near enough guide. Mere prejudice can lead us nowhere save into a cloud of make-believe moral thunder. A medieval writer inveighed against chimneys as a sign of luxury. Anaesthetics were considered contrary to the will of God. The corn-drill was anathema to Jethro Tull's labourers. Cobbett championed rush-lights. And so on.

The time has come to cast off a purely parish outlook, and to feel that we are members of one another and serve a greater

whole. This is not to be confused with listening to a relayed cathedral service in one's armchair, rather than entering one's own village church.

The more the secrets of matter are uncovered, and material power increased, the more certain it becomes that the basis of the universe is spiritual. That understanding can never be ours in an age of abstruse technologies, save through a spiritual concept. And no lesser peace is possible than the peace which passes understanding.

There is a sense that is common to men at a depth more private than the general noise of those that claim to be the vocal organs of the people. It is personal, yet self-transcendent; the persistence of a sense of direction in the much-headed-off. An idea is not born of an individual. It comes to articulation in some one person, but it has already been generated, and like a star is glimmering in many minds. An idea is to be felt to-day, a common march of mind, which the press, owing to ingrained insincerity, cannot formulate. So it is silent still, but unmistakable in its gathering power.

The common man is feeling for a common denominator of Good, which autocrats, big and petty, fear and seek to frustrate. Seeking for a stronger tie-beam to take the stresses of a greater achitecture. It is impossible to be the architect of one's own life any more, or of one's own farm, without constant reference to the concept of a social conscience rising like a green tree through the broken tablets of man-made law.

One can only be open to this, the yet unspoken, by quietness and tranquillity. By disallowing all prejudice, whether of the old

against the reaping machine, or the preacher
against the scientist.

THE END

