



THE MAN ON THE LAND

—And His Wife In The Kitchen

WE were looking through the bride's town flat; when we came to the model kitchen, she said: "And I can stand in the middle and reach everything!" It was at that moment that such a passion of envy seized me that I believe I actually saw the green-eyed monster spitting venom from the corner of her perfect sink shelf.

For only a woman from Brobdingnag could stand in the middle of a farm kitchen and reach everything—and even then she would have to be one of their finest specimens, for our kitchens run rather to size than to economy of footsteps. But then with us the kitchen is not a mere labour-saving device; it is a community hall. There the woman of the house works while her men-folk spend a wet day in arguing about the price of wool, doing the farm accounts and reading the papers, and her visitors discuss Aldous Huxley and Virginia Woolf. There, too, if all other occupations pall during a wet week, her children play indoor games—and, preferably, ping-pong.

She cooks through it all. Indeed, she secretly believes that she could bake through an air raid and that not even the last trump could make her forget the baking powder. For, if she is wise, she has early learnt to put cooking in its proper place—a necessary task to be done as well and as automatically as possibly. Only thus will she be able to preserve her reason when two conversations and an argument about the ping-pong score are all going on at the same time.

My Kitchen To Myself

"My kitchen to myself, please Mum," used to be the slogan of every self-respecting cook. No farmer's wife would dream of attempting such an ideal. There is something fatally attractive about a kitchen, particularly on a cold day. "Shall we do our business here?" suggests the stock agent when the farmer is about to lead him away. "It's so much cozier—and we won't disturb your wife." "I'll just bring my knitting beside you," says her guest, "then I can tell you all about that play I enjoyed so much." "We won't worry you, Mother," murmur the children hypocritically; "we'll just have a perfectly quiet game of Monopoly"—and the uproar that

immediately ensues sends even the cats from the hearth to seek the great open spaces.

But the farmer's wife cooks on. . . .

Meals In The Kitchen

Ah, those meals in the farm kitchen! They have been the subject of many eulogies—written invariably, I have observed, by visiting townsmen. For outsiders enjoy the sight of so truly democratic an assembly, a common board where drover and M.P. may rub shoulders, while opposite a bishop chats urbanely to the local blacksmith. They are all equally guests in this kitchen—and it does not follow for a moment that the M.P. reads better books than the drover, or that the bishop's best story compares with the blacksmith's—more particularly with that unexpurgated edition that is popular when the hostess leaves the room.

By Mary Scott

For herself, the farmer's wife appreciates the cosmopolitanism of the gathering rather in retrospect than at the moment, for then she is far too busy trying to remember whether it is the bishop or the M.P. who holds fanatical ideas about vegetarianism, and to put the brake upon the drover's best story of the Archdeacon and the baby. She is wondering, too, whether the pudding is large enough, and regretting a little wistfully that "open house" is so notoriously her rule that no visitor would dream of giving warning of his intention of dining with her. "We know that you never make any difference," they all say blandly; and she tries to appreciate this tribute to her supernatural powers.

But to-day, perhaps because of the presence of the Church at her table, she catches herself suddenly wondering what meals will be like in Heaven. Later, when her guests have done the mountains of washing up—"Nonsense, my dear lady, a bishop's apron surely entitles him to such privileges!"—and—"A Member of the Legislature, my dear Mrs. B., is no good if he isn't a practical man; Jack-of-all-trades, or he'll never be master of his one, eh Bishop?"—when she has mopped up the resulting swamp and done the saucepans—for who could expect men so distinguished to realise that food must after all be cooked in something?—then the farmer's wife sits down in one of the several comfortable chairs her kitchen contains and allows herself to dream of that Utopian meal that flashed so tantalisingly across her mind in the middle of her lunch party.

Eating In Utopia

She knows exactly how she would eat in her own particular Utopia. Not at a table; most certainly never at a large table completely filled with hungry and talkative people. She will eat entirely alone. Her meal will be set upon a tray that she can carry to the window-seat so that she may look out at the view while she eats. On the tray, propped against the milk jug, will be a book—and when she is not looking at the view she will read. All round her will

be soothing waves of heavenly silence. She will not have to make tactful conversation and avoid politics with anyone; she will not have to remember that reading at meals sets a bad example to the children; she will not have to offer anyone a second helping, and kick her youngest son to show him that it is a case of "Family Hold Back"; she will not have to hurry over her meal because there is the phantom of washing-up grimly beckoning; she will just be able to sit and eat and dream.

Moreover, she will not have to be polite to anyone, to swallow her indignation at views she detests, to ask after wool prices in which she feels 'not the slightest interest, to discuss recipes that bore her and children for whom she feels no womanly enthusiasm whatsoever. . . . She will never, never have to talk through and against the wireless because in Utopia people listen to music—or switch it off. . . . She will never have to smile attractively when her husband says, "This pudding isn't quite up to your standard, my dear," or when her eldest son pushes his plate aside and says he thinks he'd like some bread and cheese, thank you. She will not care when or where or what anybody else in the world eats, for she will eat always and absolutely alone.

Then she will be able to do the things that have attracted her all her life—to ignore the butter knife and to eat asparagus with her knife and fork; and when she is able to behave like this without hearing a darling piping voice say, "But Mother, I thought you said we shouldn't do that"—why then she will know that she is, in very truth, in Utopia.

And, if she is wise, she will stay there—and never, never return to her farm kitchen. . . .

Take A Note Of These Talks:

- 1YA: *The Value of Bees to Agriculture. From the Horticultural Division. Monday, September 4, 7.30 p.m.*
Grassing on Gum Lands. By E. B. Glanville, Instructor at Whangarei. Monday, 7.40 p.m.
- 2YC: *Dehorning Calves. From the Department of Agriculture. Tuesday, September 5, 7.30 p.m.*
Hill Country Management on an Outstanding Wairarapa Farm, from the Young Farmers' Clubs. Tuesday, September 5, 7.40 p.m.
- 3YA: *Review of the Journal of Agriculture and the Sheep Survey, at 7.35 p.m.; and 7.50 p.m. on Thursday, September 7.*
Grass Staggers. From the Department. Friday, September 8, 7.35 p.m.
- 4YA: *Preparing Fruit for Export. From the Horticultural Division. Monday, September 4, 7.30 p.m.*
Pure Milk Production. By J. P. Shennan. Monday, 7.40 p.m.
- 3ZR: *From Lesser-Known Grasses. By Mr. Mercer, Fields' Inspector. Monday, September 4, 7.32 p.m.*
- 4YZ: *Some Stock Problems of the Spring. By A. G. Brash. Tuesday, September 5, 8 p.m.*
- 4ZB: *For the Man on the Land. Mondays and Thursdays, 12.30 p.m.*