



A FARMER'S LIFE

(Written for "The Listener"
by "DUKIE")

HE pushed his hat a little further on the back of his head and removed the piece of grass he was chewing from his mouth.

"Yes! The forgotten race! That's what you could call us!" he told me.

"Forgotten? Surely not! Every day the papers have columns about you and your work. They are always saying how important production is."

"Hm! But does anyone ever take any notice? I'll bet you," he wagged a finger under my nose, "that those city people never even read it. All they bother about is what's happening in Europe or Iran or French Indo-China or some such place. Hardly one per cent of them even knows what's happening at his own back door. Not they! They are too busy moaning about their own troubles. Growing because they can't get bread on Saturdays. And why can't they get bread on Saturdays? Because their husbands and sons and daughters are too lazy to work decent hours, that's why. Anyhow, how often do we get bread? Twice a week and always have done—leastwise as long as we've had a baker. My mother used to bake her own bread."

HE paused and chewed his piece of grass for a moment.

Then, "Forty-hour week!" he spat. "Forty-hour week! Next thing they'll want to get paid for doin' nothin'. And they'll want us over-worked fools to feed 'em. Us that gets up at four in the morning and goes to bed dead beat at eight-thirty at night, and no picture shows even if we did feel fresh enough to go to 'em. Us that has cows to milk, sheep to shear, hay to make, crops to sow, calves to feed, and a thousand other things beside. Workin' seven days a week and sometimes, if we have trouble with our beasts, half the night as well. No startin' at nine and leavin' off at five for us, with Saturdays and Sundays off. And if we do get a holiday, when do we get it? In the winter. No sun bathin' and boatin' and what not for us."

"But aren't there compensations?"
"Such as?"

"Good fresh food—not the shop-kept food of the towns, but meat, milk, fruit, and vegetables fresh on your tables."

"Yes! But what about the cake shops, pork butchers, pie shops and so on in town? They get lots of delicacies that we never see."

"I think that on the whole that country tables are more loaded with good things than the town ones."

"Oh, no doubt. But that's because our women are more capable as cooks."

"Well, then, there's the good fresh air—not the smoke-grimed, petrol-scented fumes of the town."

He chewed meditatively.

"Hm. Can't say the pigsties and cowsheds smell too good at times."

"And if you want a day off to shop you can take it. Most farmers go to town for a day once a week. The townspeople, especially those who work, find it exceedingly hard to find time to shop. I've heard of girls going without their lunches to get a bit of shopping done. Yes, and men too!"

"Oh, yes! We get to town but we got to do half-a-day's work before we go and another half-a-day's work when we come home, and then it's probably on our minds all the time that we should have been home fixin' the fence the bull broke through, instead of bein' out gaddin'."

"And there's the quiet and peace of the country."

"Yes, too right! Especially when you take the calves from the cows or when the lambs are sent to the works."

"You just look at the black side of things all the time," I told him.

"And wouldn't you if you had a job like ours? We've got to slave morning, noon, and night—no set hours, no fixed wages. If the cows don't come in as you expect them to, if the feed goes off and they dry off too soon, if the calves die, or the wool clip is bad, you think we should smile and go on slavin' our lives out, come wind or fine weather. We should see everyone else getting privileges and big pay and not say a word. We can't get help and now the boys'll want to know if they can have a 40-hour week if they come to help us milk. You see if they don't! And that'll mean the missus or the kids'll have to milk in the week-end."

"WOULD you like a job in town?" I asked.

"Me? Not on your life. I wouldn't live cooped up like a sardine sittin' in my neighbour's lap for all the tea in China! Me a town bloke? Not likely! Anyhow, look here, I must be gettin' on. I can't stand round here all day listenin' to you talk. I got work to do, remember."

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