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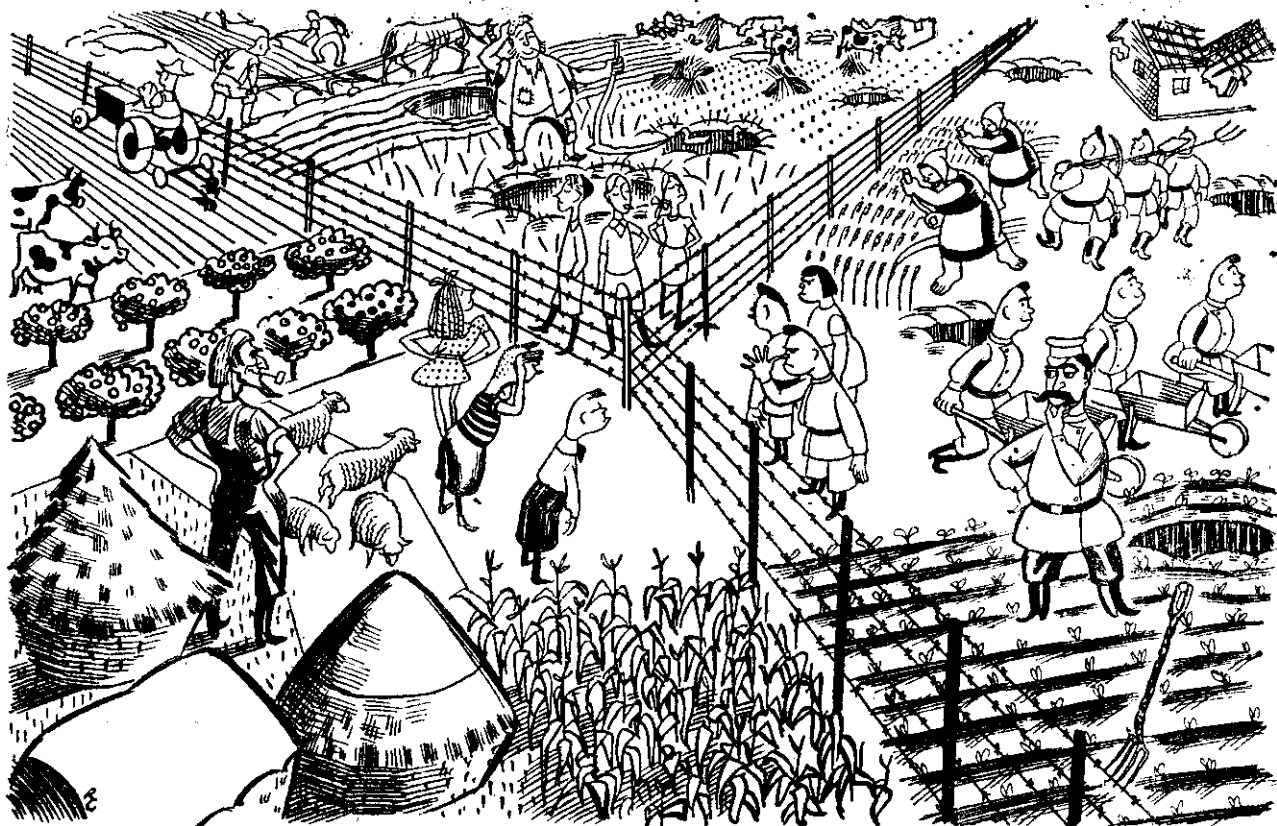
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THE FARMERS...

A Simple Story Without a Simple Ending

THERE was once a country that was divided up into a number of farms of various sizes. There was not always a direct relation between the size and fertility of a farm and the size of the family that it had to support, so that it came about that there were considerable differences in the standards of living in this one community. However, except for attempts from time to time by over-crowded or domineering farmers to take over by force whole, or part of, a neighbouring property

there was no effort made to rectify this disparity which was accepted as the natural order.

Now different farms by their climate, location, or skill of the farmer, were suited to growing different crops; and the opinion had once been expressed

Written for "The Listener" by
M.J.S.

that if all the farms were fully productive together their yield would be sufficient to feed and clothe every farmer's family. But as this statement had, for various reasons, never been put to the test, it remained an opinion only.

The first reason was that each farmer held it as an inviolable right that he should run his farm in his own way regardless of any outside considerations, and that his own interests should be paramount. This he had been told by his father and his grandfather before him, and had come to regard it as a self-evident proposition. For instance, if a river ran through several properties each farmer tended to regard his part of the river as his personal possession, and it was unusual for the farmers whose lands were watered by one river to come together willingly, if at all, to discuss joint projects for flood and erosion control, water utilisation, or boating facilities. As for determining what crops should be grown, each farmer made his own plans with a mixture of guess, expediency, and hope.

THE second reason was the varying prosperity of the different farms. When a farmer had a surplus of a crop

that grew well on his property he could exchange this for something that he could not grow so well, or at all, himself; a sheep farmer would exchange his spare wool and mutton with his neighbouring dairy-farmer for his spare dairy produce and a little beef as a change from the everlasting mutton, and so on. So all would have been well except for the varying quantities of surplus available for exchange. A farmer with a large family and rather poor land would not be likely to have much surplus, and if, for example, he skimmed himself on his own food crop to exchange a little for wool which he could not grow his family was likely to be partly hungry and partly cold. On the other hand there might be a farmer with highly productive land who would have a greater surplus available than was needed in exchange for the other items he required.

Then a farmer's prosperity would not necessarily remain static, but, depending upon seasonal conditions, upon the farming methods used (and on various other causes which we need not discuss here), it would happen that a farm which had previously been flourishing might become much less productive.

SO it had happened at this time we are describing. One farmer, called, say, Mr. A., who had a large and very fertile estate, and what he liked to call "know-how," in his farming methods, had become (for a number of reasons) exceedingly wealthy. He maintained a large workshop where he, or rather one of his sons, made ploughs and other farm equipment; a large stud produced draught-horses to pull the ploughs; and on the varying types of land that made up his property he grew a number of

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