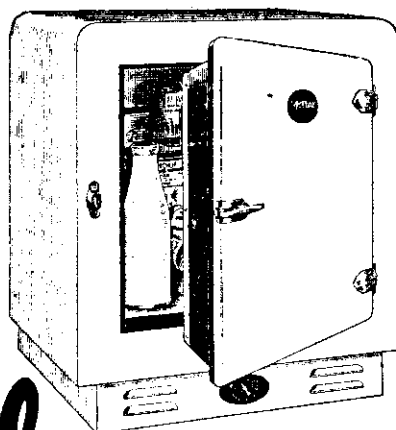


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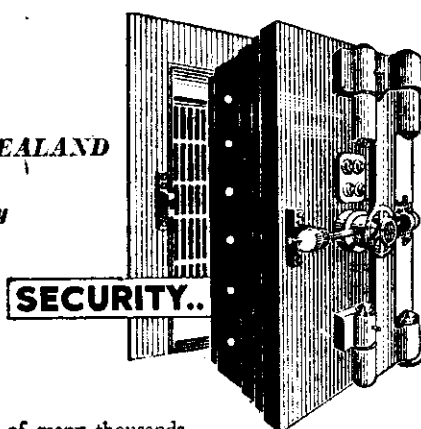
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## SHEPHERD'S CALENDAR

# Leg-roped Milker

by "SUNDOWNER"

**M**ILKING our heifer is a thumb and first finger operation which takes me 20 minutes. It is also a very personal business between her and me, and likely to end in kicks and complications if attempted by a stranger without a bail or legrope. This tickles my vanity but anchors my feet. It means

**DECEMBER 13** home; can't go away in the truck one

morning and forget to come back at night; and can't accept the offer of two generous friends to give me a run off the chain in this early-summer weather. Though January and February are still summer, they are summer on the wane—summer that is beginning to be autumn—while December has not quite ceased to be spring. As often as tomorrow is a little longer than today I feel that the best is yet to be. When tomorrow falls behind, my feet drag, too, and it is not simply a result of age.

It was, however, easy, when I was young, to get someone to milk the cows. Now hand-milkers are as rare as blade-shearers. I thought it a remarkable performance a year or two back when a young couple came from the city to live in this district and the wife learnt to milk in 20 minutes. Most wives would not have learnt in 20 years, or tried or wished to learn. Their attitude to cows is the attitude to all domestic chores of a woman I met in America. "Peel potatoes? Don't tell me that women still peel potatoes in Noo Zealand!" She neither peeled nor washed nor handled them, but bought them canned and ready for the pot in the nearest market. Even in New Zealand it is rare to find anyone primitive enough still to milk by hand, set the milk in big dishes, and take off the cream in 36 hours with a perforated skimmer. I don't think our grandchildren will know what skim milk is, and go on remembering where the name came from. Nor will pretty maids lose their matrimonial chances because their whole fortune is their face. It

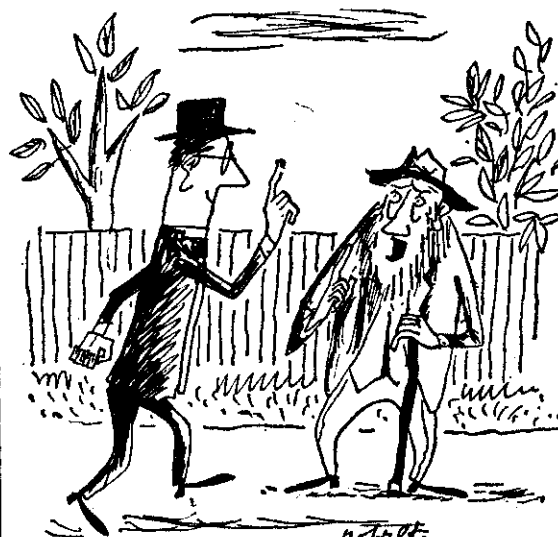
will be going a-milking that will cause them to be passed by as socially hopeless.

**I**N 45 years after we both grew up and went our own way I saw Tom Adams only three or four times and heard from him only five or six times. Our meetings, as well as our letters, were cordial, and almost affectionate, but I think each always knew that the other was not his man. Now I find myself wondering why.

Every man who takes longer than a sensible man should to learn the folly of some of his ways is jealous of those who never have to learn. I realise that my jealousy of Tom reached irritation sometimes, and impatience quite often; but I always knew that it was jealousy, and Tom, I think, never knew of its existence at all. In any case he would not have resented it if he had known. He would have been as tolerant in that situation as in others that must have tested him more severely—our divergence in faith, in moral and political attitudes, and my neglect of so many social responsibilities that weighed heavily with him. If we drifted apart therefore, it was clearly my doing and not his.

But it was a shock to me the other day when he died. It seems only yesterday, and is, in fact, only a very few years, since I was speaking to his father, I think past 90 then, and looking 70. I had always expected Tom to outlive all his contemporaries, partly because of that inheritance, and partly because his whole life from childhood on was temperate and wise. I don't know why he died so many years before what seemed to be his time, and I find no comfort at all in the conventional thought that God knows best; knows why a man like Tom must go and a hundred cumberers of the earth remain; why courtesy is not wanted and rudeness is; why a civilised man can be spared more easily than a lumpish boor; why the wages of wisdom have been death, and of folly, in so many cases, long life. I see no gleam of reason or light in any of that. But if God said, "Perfection is mine. Everything that this man did from his youth up was done well. He had no failures, and he was not corrupted by success." If the divine argument ran like that I could follow it more easily; but I could not pretend to know why death was the appropriate answer.

**I** MET a man today who habitually brushes his hair from left to right; but this afternoon the parting was down the middle and I was annoyed. I knew that it was absurd to be annoyed, but the knowledge did not prevent me from harbouring a host of cranky thoughts that, if there had been any substance in them, would have left the poor chap morally bedraggled. It



"Morning, Father"

N.Z. LISTENER, JANUARY 8, 1954.