

The Vanishing Plough

by "SUNDOWNER"

WHEN God sat day and night on a throne, looking like Leonardo's Bald-headed Old Man, and the Devil went about like a raging lion seeking little boys to devour, I could not always go straight to sleep when I went to bed. I don't know how old I was when revivalists ceased terrifying me, but one kept me in misery for a long time with the old Scots chestnut about the sinner who pleaded ignorance at the Judgment Seat: "Lord, I didna' ken it was wrong."

"Well, you ken the noo," the Lord answered, and cast him screeching into Hell.

It is now a ridiculous memory, but I am glad there is no hell for dogs. It would be horrible to have to shoot or lambast Scamp for the sins he commits in ignorance, one of which never ceases to amuse me. He is not permitted in the garden enclosure, which is more than twice as long as it is broad, and at the back quite steep. He knows that he must not come in, and makes no attempt to enter even when gates are open. If I trim a hedge on the east side he runs down and round. If I move to the west he goes up and round; but this time he does not go all the way. He cuts off about ten yards on the top of the orchard and runs through at that level, but never stops on the way. That he knows would bring trouble: he would be in the garden. But no trouble comes if he keeps moving (though he now has a beaten track), since I pretend not to see him, and he has, I am sure, ceased to remember that he is breaking an instruction. He doesn't ken, and I can't find it in my heart to make him ken. But I wish I had known when I was young that God can see a joke, too.

THERE are two sights in the world worth seeing. I once heard an old fellow say in a British farm broadcast: a good rick, and a well-turned furrow. I wonder if, now and again, he can still see them. I saw sheaf stacks in Britain seven years ago—some, I remember, with a slag heap on one side and Durham Cathedral on the other—and a few are no doubt being built still. But it will be fewer and fewer every year until there are no stackers left to



build them. As for the well-turned furrows, though I will not live long enough to see ploughs disappear, I have already seen horse-ploughing go, and tractor-ploughing will never equal horseploughing in appearance. I don't think the attempt will be made. If ploughs continue to be used—what we still mean by ploughs—the emphasis will be on the area turned over and not on its appearance afterwards. But it is unlikely, I think, that our grandchildren will know the implement the world calls a plough in 1956.

However, I do not myself find a well-turned furrow so pleasing to look at as a furrow being turned. A ploughed paddock is certainly a spectacle if the ploughing is uniformly good; but a paddock being ploughed, half turf and half fresh soil, the furrows falling smoothly into position, the ploughman following and not leading the plough, guiding it and not just looking back at it and hoping for the best, horses steaming, gulls calling, mould-boards shining, and the uncovered earth breathing fertility and life—that, I think, is a picture to carry in the memory as long as we have memories, exciting and yet soothing when we see it, and not to be forgotten afterwards until the night comes when everything fades.

BY the calendar Elsie should have had a calf three days ago. By her present mood and condition, she may keep us watching, waiting, and speculating for at least three days longer. Gestation is physiology and not mathematics. No one knows when her calf began. If we did know that, to the day and the hour, we could still not say to the day and hour when it would decide to enter the world. All we could say would be that the time had come when most calves of the same age would bestir themselves and try to get born. We know no more than that, and Elsie does not know as much.

JULY 28 AT that point, like the doctors who get tired of waiting for their patients, I decided to try a little persuasion. So I brought Elsie into the garden, and for nearly two hours let her fill her belly with green grass. This she did so

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thoroughly that she was not a pretty picture when she went out, and she at once made me feel clever and hopeful. Instead of joining the other two beasts she went away by herself to a corner under the macrocarpas, stood for five minutes looking soulful, sniffed at the ground, turned round, looked soulful again; but when I went back again after reporting progress indoors, she had rejoined Betty and resumed grazing. I think she was herself inclined to oblige me, but got no co-operation from her calf. Now we are back where we were, Elsie in no hurry to become a mother for the seventh time, her owner in no hurry to assume the duty of milking her.

(To be continued)

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