

Conscience and Cowardice

by "SUNDOWNER"

ANDY is still alive, and lying on my conscience like lead. In 24 hours I have not been able to make up my mind whether to be a farmer or remain a fool. I decided years ago that no calf of mine would ever wait at the gate for the bobby truck—that if I could not keep it I would not ask someone else

to kill it for me. **NOVEMBER 1** and then hold out my hand for his silver. But I had also decided, or thought I had, that I would not keep a bull calf to be mutilated, fattened, and sold for as many pounds as I could squeeze out of the market for him after we had lived together for three years. So Andy has had two drinks out of a bucket, and lies looking at me under the flowering branches of a locust tree without a suspicion of the turmoil he has started in my mind.

If I were a full-time farmer on a full-sized farm I might or might not go through all these conflicts as often as I had to kill a calf or tail a lamb or dispose of a cockerel or make away with a burdened and burdensome old dog. I hope I would, but I am not sure that I would. I am, however, a kind of farmer-pretender, in need of everything the land will give me, but so long accustomed to eking out a living in other ways that success or failure as a farmer makes no great difference to my very humble standard of living. My farm is just an old man's home, and it is not so necessary for me as for real farmers to murder and mutilate my animals, orphan and segregate them, or walk off and leave them. I am here to live with them as well as to live on them, and if I end Andy's life before it begins—send a bullet into his brain while he is deep in sleep—I defeat myself in the effort to avoid trouble and pain later on. For he must sooner or later die. Long before he is mature he must be emasculated; long before he has stopped growing he must undergo a butcher's change into something rich and (some day, I hope), strange. If he had an aristocratic father I could leave

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without being cumbrous." Or, maybe, he had a bigger table than the one I work on.

Anyway, at this stage I closed the *Webster's* with a sigh. The time had come for it to be stacked back into its place again. I must get back to work.

And so, back I went to the typewriter. . . And there I stuck, with my fingers on the keys. For the life of me I couldn't remember whether *Inditement* had an "e" following the first "t" or not. . . I took it as a sign that I should stop work for the morning altogether.

I decided to go right out and invite my father-in-law to a "smell-feast." Anyway, it was a word from his own dictionary—he couldn't make any objection to it, could he?

him alone with a clear conscience, since his mother, while she was carrying him, produced 450 pounds of butter-fat. But his father is a great hulking Shorthorn weighing four-fifths of a ton and built on lines that fashion has now abandoned. Andy is physiologically wrong for milk production, genetically wrong for propagation, anatomically wrong for maturing quickly into the fashionable new joints. He has nothing but mournful eyes and a mush-headed owner; but God made us both, and I am not going to be the coward lamented by W. H.



National Publicity Studios photograph
Who dares not make fast friends with kine?

Davies who "dares not make fast friends with kine" because man and not God decides when they must die.

I HAD an enemy once who wrought me much harm. He was a liar and a coward and worked through stooges who owed him money. It was my duty to hate him as much as I hated his ways—"curse his basket and his store, kale and potatoes." But I was never strong enough for that. I would be strong for a day, or two, push him into that black corner of my mind reserved for malice and meanness and nastiness. Then I would meet his wife or one of his children, see him in old clothes working in his garden, or come on him dangling his legs over the wharf catching Friday's dinner. Trying to hate him then was like trying to hate the cat that purrs round our legs after stealing the milk or the pup that advances wagging his tail with a dead hen in his mouth. I could never do it. If he did not see me I sneaked away, hoping that he would not look round. But it was worse

when he did see me. He would greet me so warmly and so heartily that I would find myself wondering as I talked to him if he was one man or two; if he had forgotten or I had gone crazy; if black was black and white white, or both an entirely different colour. There was not a trace of guile in him now that I could discover; no greed; no jealousy; no brutality. Where they had gone I could never decide, but I knew that they would reappear.

I knew that the closer we drew together now the more certainly, and the more easily, he would injure me later; that the seeds of evil were in him, viable to the day of his death. I could take precautions against them, but I could not hate the soil in which they grew or the fertilising intelligence that made them grow fast. I kept on trying, but there was a combination of qualities in him that always made a fool of me; geniality, not affected but fundamental; fear, physical as well as moral, so deep rooted and so obvious that it aroused either sympathy or pity; ignorance, which kept him superstitious, religious, and in his coarse way reverent; courage, not exactly Dutch, and not exactly desperate, since it was never blind and never insensitive, but exercised in defiance of his sense of sin and creeping fears of the consequences of sin.

What would have happened to him or to me if we had continued to meet I don't know; perhaps murder, perhaps only progressive corruption on both sides. But I left the district, and—it sounds novelettish but is true—he sickened and died. When I heard that he was sick I had to struggle to keep myself from writing to him or returning to visit him; but I did win that battle—even when his sickness went on and on, and the reports I had of his condition were more and more piteous.

But today I saw him again mingling with the crowd at the Show. For a flash I actually believed it. Then I recovered and knew that I was looking at a stranger to whom nature had given the size, shape, colour and expression of a man who for 30 years had been dust. If he had returned he would not have visited Addington in Show Week. He had no interest in animals, and I have sometimes wondered what effect they would have had on him if he had ever been fond of them.

(To be continued)

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