

SENSE v. SENTIMENT

by "SUNDOWNER"

I HAVE now found the passage from Hudson that was in the back of my head yesterday—not, as I thought, in *A Shepherd's Life*, but in the collection of essays he called *Afoot in England*. He has overtaken a cowman near Ottery St. Mary, driving nine milch cows, all pure Devons ("perfect beauties in their bright red coats"). Naturally they talk

about cows, and he is interested to hear that there are cows in Devon like the cows of Patagonia—so strongly maternal that robbing them of their calves robs them of their capacity to give milk. They "hold it back," he explains, and fall into a sullen rage. Then in a few days "their fountains dry up," and there is no more milk until a calf arrives again.

But he is troubled by the silence of the cows of England:

I told my companion of long rambles on the Mendips, along the valley of the Somerset Axe, where I had lately been, and where of all places in this island, the cow should be most esteemed and loved by man. Yet even there, where, standing on some elevation, cows beyond one's power to number could be seen scattered far and wide in the green vales beneath, it had saddened me to find them so silent. It is not natural for them to be dumb; they have great emotions and mighty voices—the cattle on a thousand hills. Their morning and evening lowing is more to me than any other natural sound—the melody of birds, the springs and dying gales of the pines, the wash of waves on the long shingled beach. The hills and valleys of that pastoral country flowing with milk and honey should be vocal with it, echoing and re-echoing the long call made musical by distance. The cattle are comparatively silent in that beautiful district, and indeed everywhere in England, because men have made them so. They have, when deprived of their calves, no motive for the exercise of their voices. For two or three days they call loudly and incessantly, day and night, like Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted: grief and anxiety inspire that cry—it is a powerful, harsh, discordant sound, unlike the long musical call of the cow that has a calf, and remembering it, and leaving the pasture, goes lowing to give it suck.

It is the man from the open spaces lamenting the small enclosures. Hudson himself was never a farmer, and the farmers among whom he grew up were not dairy-farmers. His world was wide—as wide for cattle as for men.

JIM is openly glad that this year's pet lambs give us more trouble every day than last year's pet has given

us in 16 months. He thinks that we may now learn the farmer's first lesson with lambs—to rear them in the paddock on a ewe and not about the house on a bottle. Last year's lamb, he keeps telling us, was a freak. When we put it over the fence

NOVEMBER 22 it stayed there, and when we stopped its milk it maintained itself comfortably on grass. It ate no peas, pulled up no flowers, stripped no young fruit trees, bored no holes in our young hedges. We could go to bed without wondering where it would be in the morning, and visit the city without anxiety if we pegged it out on a chain. Those happy days are gone. Our lambs have not yet milked the cow in our absence, or gathered and eaten the eggs, but there is not much else they have not done, or come near doing, to the garden, our domestic peace, and themselves. What they do to themselves can, in fact, be more worrying than most of the things they do to us. I came home one night to find the total abstainer with his two hind legs tied together, and then to a tree, and the drinker just about hanged on his tethering peg. We have found them thrown and unable to get up, and once I found a leg so securely lashed to a stake that I had to undo the collar before I could unwind the chain. (Swivels with lambs give no protection at all unless the chain runs on a wire three or four feet above the ground.)

I agree with Jim that it would have been better to spend a day or two working these lambs off on foster mothers, or a minute or two burying them. I always agree with sensible people when it is not possible to be sensible. Then sanity gives way to sentimentality. Though I could escape from my troubles by trucking the cause of them to Ad-dington, as any sensible farmer would, a fool in spring is a fool in summer and autumn. It is easier to kill an abandoned lamb and bury it than to kill a hand-fed lamb and eat it, or sell it to somebody else to eat. But I have not learnt my lesson. I was weak when I should have been strong, and if

I am strong when the truck comes it will not be real strength but selfishness, anger, and irritation. It doesn't worry me to be thought a fool, or to be a fool. But I don't like suffering as a fool, and that is what animals make us do the moment we allow sentimentality to rule us. It would, of course, help if I tightened my fences; but wires work loose; gates get left open; grass gets short; animals, even pets, have often to be moved. The question is: whose grass is it? Whose paddocks? Whose gates and fences? Whose world?

(To be continued)



Whose gates and fences? Whose world?

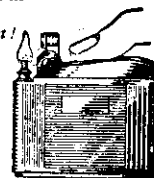


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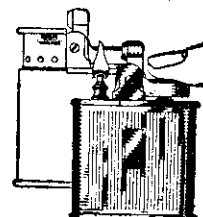
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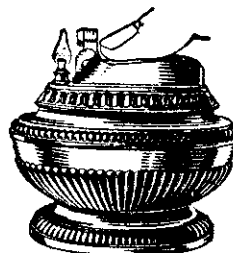
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