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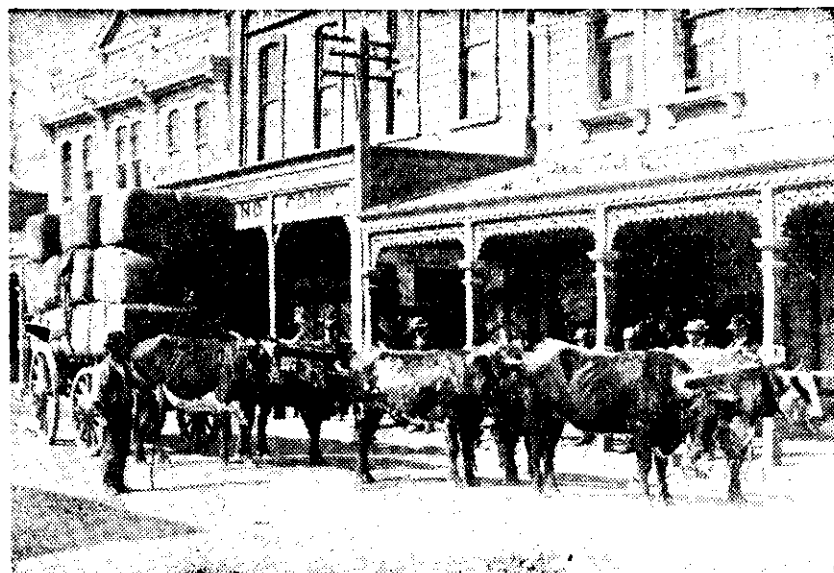
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Shepherd's Calendar

BURKE ON FARMING

by "SUNDOWNER"

LONG before I finished Mitchell's Wet Days I was tired of his manner; but his matter held me to the end. He was, in fact, my only reading for almost a week, and I did not wait for rain before turning to him. But it is only in patches that I would wish to read him again, and most of those

are borrowed
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will perhaps feel thankful, when they read what a wife's duties were in the age of Henry VIII., that four centuries separate them from the author of this passage (written by the "first duly accredited writer on British history"):

It is a wives occupation to winow al maner of corne, to make malte, wash and wring, to make hey, to shere corne and in tyme of neede to helpe her husbnde to fylle the mucke wayne or donge carte, dryve the plough, to lode hay corne and such other. Also to go or ride to the market to sell butter, chese, mylke, egges, chickens, kapons, hennes, pygges, gees and al maner of corne. And also to bye al maner of necessary thinges belonging to a household, and to make a true rekenyng and accompt to her husband what she hath receyved and what she hath payed. And yf the husband go to market to bye or sell as they ofte do, he then to shew his wife in lyke maner. For if one of them should use to disceive the other, he disceyveth himselfe, and he is not lyke to thryve, and therefore they must be true ether to other. . . I could peradventure shew the husbnde of divers pointes that the wives disceive their husbndes in, and in lyke maner howe husbndes disceive their wives. But yf I should do so I should show mo subtil pointes of disceite than either of them knew of before; and therefore me semeth best to holde my peace.

I FIND it difficult to think of Edmund Burke as a farmer, but Mitchell gives him an honourable place in the history of agriculture, and credits him with many fresh and interesting ideas. He does not, however, suggest that Burke made farming pay. He

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almost suggests that it was Burke's belief that farming never pays. Here is the great man's answer to those who think farming either easy, safe, or profitable:

Farming is a very poor trade; it is subject to great risks and losses. The capital, such as it is, is turned but once in the year; in some branches it requires three years before the money is paid; I believe never less than three in the turnip and grass-land course. It is very rare that the most prosperous farmer, counting the value of his quick and dead stock, the interest of the money he turns, together with his own wages as a bailiff or overseer, ever makes 12 or 15 per centum on his capital. . . I have rarely known a farmer who to his own trade has not added some other employed or traffic, who, after a course of the most unremitting parsimony and labour, and persevering in his business for a long course of years died worth more than paid his debts, leaving his posterity to continue in nearly the same equal conflict between industry and want in which the last predecessor, and a long line of predecessors before him, lived and died.

I am not sure that the picture has become much brighter since Burke's day. If farming is considered as a business, it is seldom a lucrative business over a whole lifetime. I have a fairly accurate knowledge of the history of 40 or 50 farmers of my own age, and although some have grown rich, most have ended as I have myself—with a roof over their heads, and a good deal more experience than money. It is by no means a bad end, or even disappointing; but we would be a sorry lot of failures if our happiness depended on riches.

BUT the most interesting fact Mitchell reports about Burke is his belief that it was a mistake to replace bullocks by horses. Burke himself, I gather, refused to make the change, not because he was incapable of change but because he could not persuade himself that horses would be cheaper, handier, or more efficient.

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Though he did not go as far as one of his Scottish supporters, a Senior Lord of Sessions, who proved mathematically that oxen "cost less, keep for less, and sell for more" than horses, and that using them would "cheapen food, stop the importation of oats, and reduce wages," he