

# Why We Left the Farm

From The Saturday Evening Post

Fifteen years ago Louis and I were married. He was a capable farmer, as was his father before him, and well-to-do—rich his neighbors called him, because to most farmers in that day a sum of money that needed five figures for its expression meant riches.

I had never lived on the farm, but had both visited and taught in the country. Of course it had not escaped my observation that farmers' wives worked too hard and had too little recreation; in fact I had never known one whose life was not a ceaseless round of work. And the paradoxical thing about it was that the higher up the financial scale their husbands were, the harder these women worked. The comparatively poor had no hired hands to feed, did not keep so elaborate a table, had fewer chickens, put up little meat and therefore escaped soapmaking, had much less milk and fruit to care for, and, in fact, lived very much as women in the same station live in town. The rich men's wives were the overworked drudges.

It did not occur to me that I could be pushed, driven, dragged or otherwise coerced into doing like these women. Therefore, though I knew Louis' family quite well, I was sure that I should never grow to look like his hardworking mother who was old and wrinkled, or his homely sisters who lacked the grace and daintiness that I meant to keep.

His hale and hearty father was a humorous old-despot. He had long ago retired from active work, given to his grown children a large part of his lands, rented out most of the remainder and spent his abundant leisure in reading, joking his wife, keeping an eye open for any unnecessary expense in the housekeeping, and poking about the farm. Every day he could be seen slowly sauntering about the old orchard or along the hedgerows, ostensibly looking for guinea or turkey nests or stray pigs—in reality, enjoying the beauty and sweetness of all outdoors as everybody who lives in the country should do. I never knew his wife to step out of the yard unless on some pressing errand, and I am sure she never saw, with the inward eye at least, any of the beautiful things that were spread so lavishly before her in every direction. To her husband it was a matter of course that she should be so; he would as soon have expected to see

her suddenly get up and dance a horn-pipe unannounced as to see her take a walk for the sake of walking and enjoying the scenery. His was a keen and active mind, and he had early emancipated himself from the drudgery of the farm. That his wife needed any emancipation I am sure never occurred to him to the day of his death. And yet he would have indignantly denied, and in very forcible language, that he was other than a good husband. He was a good provider—of food, be it understood, not of nice clothes or furniture or conveniences or any of the pleasant things a normal woman always longs for. I have never known one of these "good providers" who was not also a "heartier eater." He was fond of remarking in his wife's presence that he had given away and rented out his land so he could help his wife with the housework—she had so much to do! This observation never failed to elicit from her a snort of rage which delighted

his soul. He really did wash the dishes sometimes, spattering dishwater impartially over floor, walls and table, and leaving the cooking vessels in such an unspeakable condition of greasiness that he was never allowed to do it except under vigorous protest.

I have seen him mind the baby when its mother was especially busy, at which times it was hard to tell which most rasperd the nerves of the distracted woman—the baby's shrieks or his stertorous singing, a duet in which each tried to outdo the other. He would sit with half-closed eyes, the baby's head as likely as not resting on a suspender buckle as it howled, he singing with all his might, but paying no more attention to the baby's comfort than if it had been a feather pillow. When at last the distracted mother snatched the infant from him the look of mild surprise which he cast upon her was belied by the twinkle in his very blue eyes. That her answering look was peculiarly bitter seemed to me at one time a little funny—she was so obviously without a sense of humor but I have lived to suspect that the sense of humor possessed by many husbands is likely to kill that same sense in the women who have to live with them and endure their humorous remarks and actions.

When Louis and I became engaged there was a good deal of the usual misgiving indulged in on each side of the house.

"Eleanor a farmer's wife! What a joke! She will have to wear her wedding clothes ten years and then make them over for the children," said my flippant young sister.

Or my equally flippant young brother would ask me if I expected to keep a hen to lay eggs for us, and whether I knew which breeds of cows gave sweet milk and which gave buttermilk! And would I carry the butter to town, wearing a slat sunbonnet, as Mrs. So-and-So did? Whereupon he would imitate me doing it, with a comicality that swept the rest of the family with gusts of laughter, even though my gentle mother always looked at me in a troubled way.

"Are you quite sure of yourself, Eleanor?" she asked me timidly one day, for the subject of love and marriage was a very sacred one to her and not to be meddled with, even by a parent.

"Quite sure, mother dear," I replied, with a brave smile and a kiss; and she never hinted further that she had misgivings.

Louis was hearing from his family after this wise:

"Eleanor is a nice girl—a very nice girl—but a farmer's wife! She can play the piano, but can she cook? She can entertain you with her conversation, but who will sew on your buttons? You admire her fine clothes now, but how will you like them when you have to foot the bills?"

We cared as little what any of them said as any other young people do under similar circumstances. Life with each other could mean nothing but happiness. We would meet and conquer all its difficulties together. How fortunate it is that young people always look at the glaring sun of reality through the smoked glass of imagination!

We were married early in the year in my city home and springtime found us settled in the new cottage on Louis' farm, everything therein inexpensive, but dainty, tasteful and fresh. There were no conveniences such as the simplest city cottage contains. All water was drawn from a well in the yard; there was no sink in my kitchen—and, of course, no bathroom or furnace, no built-in china-closets, linen-presses or bookshelves; but at that time not half a dozen country houses in our whole county had any of these things, though many of the farms were worth one hundred dollars an acre, and a farm of less than three hundred and twenty acres was scarcely looked upon as a large one.

I did not know much about housework when I married, but I had the true home-loving instinct, a habit of orderliness and abundant energy. Given these, a woman of ordinary intelligence learns what must be learned about housework quickly. I think I must have been born a good cook, descended as I am from generations of Southern women famous for their hospitality; for my cooking was a source of wonder to all of Louis' relatives.

"The best cook in the family!" they declared.

In fact, my entire management was a surprise to them and a source of pride to Louis. That I could maintain my personal daintiness while working in the

kitchen was also a matter of frequent remark among them.

I did all my own work, and worked as hard as any woman ought to have to work; for, aside from the fact that I had no conveniences to lighten my labor, I was learning as I went and often took a dozen steps where one would have answered.

When I displayed my household linen, prepared by my own hands before my marriage, to Louis' mother, she took one of the hemstitched monogrammed sheets in her hands and said scornfully:

"What do you think these will look like after the hired hands have slept on them a while?"

"We will not have the men in the house," I answered quietly. "There are two tenant houses on the farm and it is much better to let them live outside our home."

She smiled pityingly.

"That will do for a year or two; but you will see that Louis will want them in the house after a while. He can get 'em out earlier when they are right in the house and it saves some on their wages."

I put the things away, carefully concealing my resentment and disbelief.

There was nothing in that first summer's experience to make me think she was right. Louis was very tactful and considerate. He had been ready to make many allowances for my ignorance of farm ways—even to endure some positive discomforts; and he watched my progress in housewifely arts with quiet pleasure in the fact that I seemed to be justifying his choice. From the very beginning his home was quite comfortable and he was well fed. He had early provided me with a horse and buggy of my own, and I visited my friends occasionally, drove to church or town when I wanted to do so, and lived a sane, comfortable life.

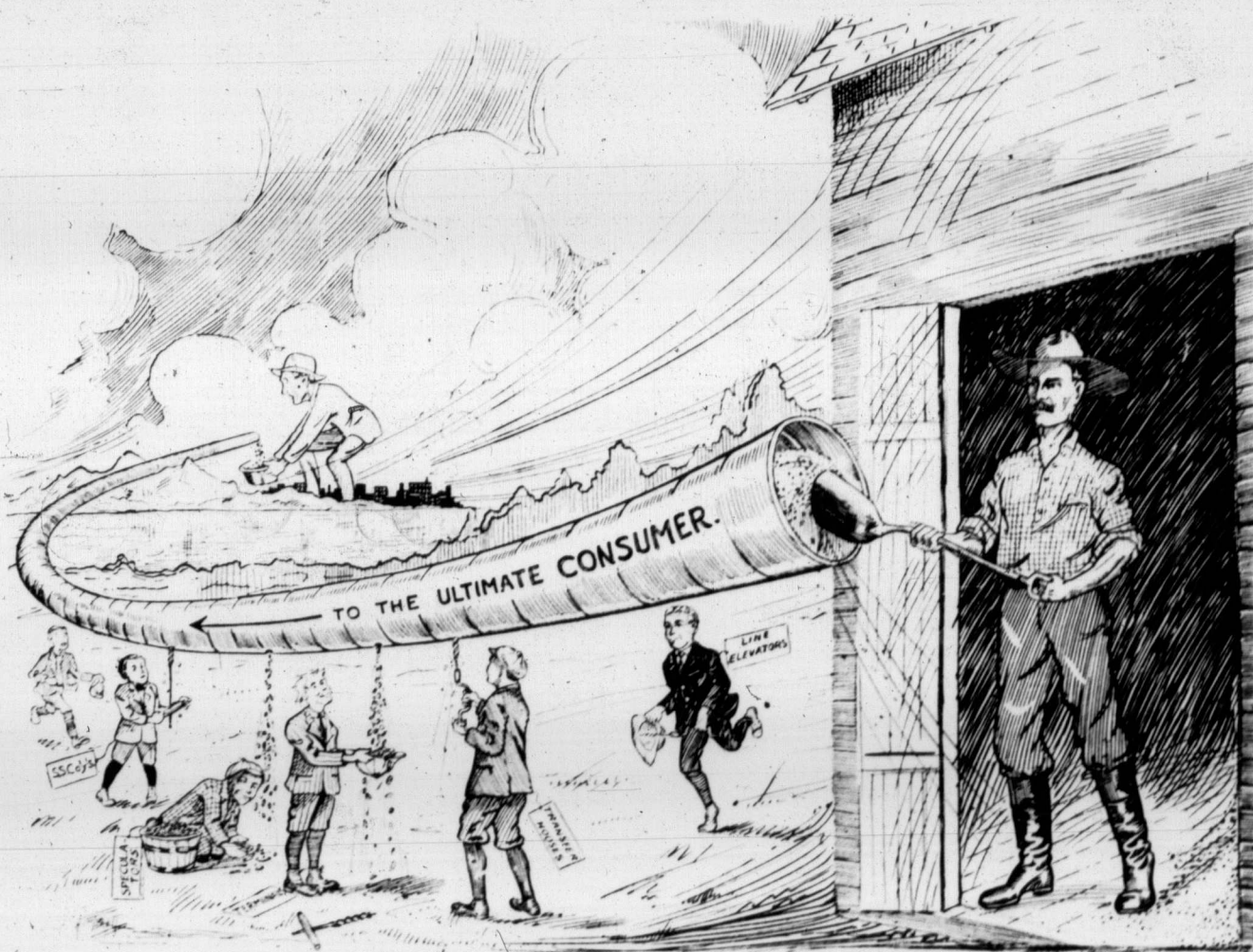
## Face to Face With the Servant Question

True, I worked hard according to the standards of city women; but my work did not take all my time and the beautiful country life compensated me even for the hampering conditions under which I labored. I had always loved the country. Now I never missed strolling out in the late afternoons to the woods and hedgerows. Often Louis went with me and we always came back laden with wild

flowers for our rooms.

I never failed to return rested, no matter how tired I had been upon starting out. By the evening lamp I read aloud to Louis or played for him, and we were as foolishly happy as young married couples much in love with each other usually are. I was not bothered with the hands, or with milking, or with the heavy gardening—as was my husband's mother. I did not yet have many chickens or much fruit on the farm. I kept myself and my house immaculate, and pridefully felt that I had solved the farm-life problem easily and well. It makes me smile a little to remember that I thought then that my work would be easier after a while when Louis was able to put modern conveniences in the house. I even thought, if he became very prosperous, that I would find a nice maid to do the hardest work. I was to face the servant question in the country much sooner than I anticipated.

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FROM FARMER TO BRITISH CONSUMER  
Too many middlemen are tapping the pipe