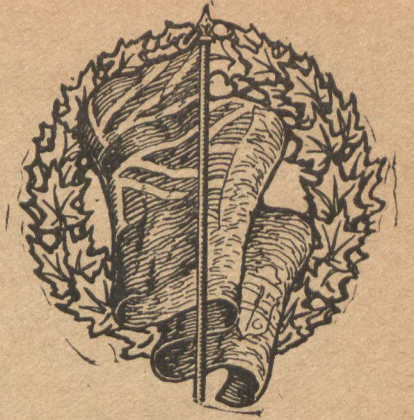




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THE PROFESSOR ON THE FARM

NOT the professor who was "raised" on the farm and returns, a welcome prodigal in haying-time, to a business that he knows as well as his own, sometimes better.

By R. KEITH HICKS

No, this article refers to the amateur, green-horn, dub or tenderfoot, what you will, who learns that help, any help, is badly needed, and sets out to discover what he can do and to do what he can; curious and perhaps a trifle timid, feeling rather like a freshman at the opening of his first term, the academic hired-man—tired-man after a few hours of it—wonders what a day's work means, and wonders what percentage of a day's work he can do between sunrise and sunset.

I know now what the farmer does in a day, what the real hired-man considers a fair return for wages paid, and what I myself succeed in accomplishing, not without mental and physical discomfort, between the first morning cough of the milking machine and the last evening purr of the separator as its three thousand revolutions die down to visible movement and gradually cease. Then I retire discreetly to a bath in the lake, the hired man takes his can of milk—he prefers skim, either on hygienic grounds or because he gets more of it—and plods, I think his gait may be described as plodding, to his cottage, while the farmer stays an hour to see that all is washed and scalded for the morrow. That, he says, is the essence of success in farming, fifteen hours of hard work and constant care, and he commands my entire respect as a man who labours with his whole strength and intelligence, uncomplaining, scarcely seeming to realize the amount of energy or the length of time that he is expending on his task.

A farmer's day is not all farming, as the lay mind would read the term; he must be also more than a competent amateur in such matters as plumbing, smithing, building in wood and cement, and of late years he must have more than a superficial knowledge of gasoline engines. Happily for myself, I had some dim notion that it might be rash to undertake to work at full pressure all day, and stipulated for leave to go my own pace for one dollar with board, the farmer to give me more when he found I was worth it. In haying time I get two dollars and am proud, but like to think it well earned, though there are moments when I would give one of them for the night to loaf a lazy half hour in the shade.

IN the beginning two cows were entrusted to my care. They were what might be called two-cylinder cows, unless teats is a presentable word—one never knows, I once heard mare objected to—and could not be put to the machine. I shall remember those cows. One is a vast, ungainly and cumbersome mechanism with round heaving flanks and a cynical droop to the flaccid pouches that hang from her revolving jaws; she regurgitates the cud in a manner that expresses contempt for me and all mankind, though I think she respects the farmer, and if I do not turn up sharp on time she lies down and mires her mis-shapen dugs on the stable-floor. I clean her stall with particular care. To understand cows as they really are you must study them from



JEDEDIAH observed that this Professor from Queen's University (and Canadian Courier contributor) was an easy mark. So he drove the team while the Professor wrestled with the hay, because, as Jedediah said, the team needed very careful driving to maintain the proper pace.

the point of view of him who milks; looked at from the position of the non-milking majority, the cow is of a mild and inoffensive blandness. Particularly not so is the cow in question, but on the contrary, a morose, dissentient beast, flicking and switching with malicious ingenuity her "slovenly, unhandsome tail"—though with all homage to Peter McArthur I could say a deal more than that about it.

However, until cows can be trained to wash their tails and comb them on their horns, the trouble must be endured. And in any case I see no remedy for Holsteins. Anyway, I learned to milk after a fashion, till the trickling and spasmodic stream that rewarded my initial efforts has swelled to a swishing flow that foams and rings on the metal with a sound not unlike the ululations of the Hawaiian ulalaika, or whatever its unhappy name may be.

The milking-machine has a fascination of sound and movement, most potent on a mind that is dormant or at least only playing, as I confess mine has been during this period of labour in the fields and stables, not thinking, but imagining, and that dimly and with swift forgetting. Technically, I can tell nothing about the machine except that it exercises a caressing alternation of suction and squeeze, but I do know that I listen with pleasure to the toc-toc of its pulsators beating out their variant rhythm, recalling now a word, now a tune or musical phrase that may

stay with me all day if I am working alone in the farmer's weedy garden or stacking shingles in his congested woodshed. Once the little nodding, dipping, brass cylinders gave a suggestion of melody from a Brahms quartette that I used to hear endlessly practised in an Ayrshire shooting lodge, and once it was Lenine—Lenine—Lenine, as all four synchronized for a half-dozen beats. I think they got him the next day.

BUT the cows soon became little more than an incident in the day's work, which now centred round the hay-loader. The hay-loader, in case there is anyone as ignorant as I was, which is, of course, possible, is a sort of ambulant escalator hitched to the back of a rack-waggon; it gathers up whole windrows of hay at the tail-end and dumps them on to me at the top. From my point of view it looks like a green and matted avalanche; from the side it has a suggestion of Punch's Prehistoric Peeps.

Jedediah, but we call him John, the real, permanent hired man, drives the team, because he says it needs very careful handling to maintain the right pace. When Ezry came I found this was not true. I stand at the back and stab and heave and tear at the clover or timothy or thistles till I can no more, and John comes to dig me out and pack the load, which he does with careful disarrangement of my previous dispositions, and we start it all over again.

About five o'clock, since there is no prospect of food till milking is over, about eight, we begin to impute all sorts of twists and torts to our excellent master, whom at ten we had extolled as the soul of probity. Such is the influence of hay-loaders on an empty stomach. As six passes and the last load reaches the top of the "gallus," Jedediah John cheers up and develops an exasperating vein of reminiscence and tells me how he played greenhorn on a lake schooner till some movement of hand or foot betrayed to the skipper the fact that John had sailed the lakes for many a year; how he quelled a lumber-camp mutiny of Glengarry Scots, twelve in number, and very clannish; how he hired a Catholic band of pipers to play "Protestant Boys" on the twelfth, and other things that he would not like me to repeat, even if I wanted to or were permitted. I suppose this is the influence of ships.

JEDEDIAH is full of saws and wise sayings. "With time and patience," he would say, "you can ride a snail to Jerusalem." I suspect that had reference to my rate of speed on the hay-loader. Once I caught a snatch of chanty about a dangerous character called Jack Macdonald, and I have learned unusual things about the rights of citizens, as for instance, that a man may walk within sixty-six feet of any Canadian shore-line. John is under the impression that our town is singular in the matter of prohibition, and is strongly of opinion that eight o'clock is no fit hour for a hired man's supper—there do I wait for him, as Panurge says of another matter. I shall be sorry to part with John or Jedediah.

If the loader can be Purgatorio, the hay-mow is surely Inferno. Imagine the interior of a metal-