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WHOLE NO. 485.

LITERATURE.  
The Honest Farmer.

From Harper's Weekly.

I have heard it said by a Londoner that though the country may be Arcadia, the people that live in it are pretty much like the Burlington Arcadians, after all. This cynical gentleman could never have seen Robert Foracre, who occupied the Manor Farm, in the town, the village in the village, in which my youth passed, and in whose quiet churchyard I hope to lay my bones. He was the very model of the honest English farmer, as represented upon the stage, which is, as everybody knows, but the reflection of human life. He had a round red face, always glowing with good humor and moderate prosperity; his eyes were small, but bright and genial; his face reflected the simplicity and rectitude of his mind, the richness of his crops, and the warmth of the sun that ripened them, and when (as he often did) he mopped it with his pocket-handkerchief, it shone again like polished mahogany. For the most part agriculturists are much given to grumble. Old Jacob Arable, who occupied the next largest farm to Mr. Foracre's in our parish, was, for example, always complaining. In the very best season the country had had for years, our rector ventured to congratulate him upon it: "Come, Mr. Arable, you must allow that everything has worked together for good up to this date?" "Well, I don't know so much about that, Sir; there will be no damaged hay for the young calves." That is the way with what George Eliot calls "bovine" men: they are never satisfied with Providence; and what is worse, they are always wanting what civilized persons do not want—such as rain. I scarcely remember a summer when the country has not been represented as in a desperate state for lack of something or another more; and I have never seen a farmer who is not ready to say, "I have to get fine weather always. I have noticed that the country gets over its troubles somehow; and then it lasts forever, which, I unappreciably, shall not."

Well, Robert Foracre was a glorious exception to these wretched blarney. When I used to say, "I hope we shall have fine weather for the cricket match," he always answered, "I hope you will, Master James," though all the time his fields are parching, and his corn rotting. "I hope it will be wet to-morrow, because then I shan't go to school," he said. "I hope so, too, Master James," though all his hay was lying out. When the squire asked him how his crops were getting on, he always answered, "Nicely, Sir; and I recollect, boy as I was, how it surprised me once to see Farmer Foracre come out of the former part of the edifice one day like a goat and an equal."

My uncle raised his eyebrows when I told him of it, as though he could not make it out; for Mr. Foracre had no daughter, and no son, and no other pulled-out ministers of storm and wind to produce unpleasantness. As I grew older he became a rustic divinity who dispensed syllabus in an orchard. (I have never tested it since, nor even thought of it since the paper in which the other day the paper of the Syllabus, which I do not believe to be half so nice.) And when I got to be a man, and lost my illusions, this good farmer still remained to me as one of the noblest works of Providence within my limited horizon.

From what I have said as to his unruffled temper and sanguine views it will be gathered that Mr. Foracre was a bachelor. He had come as a stranger into our district when he was a young fellow of four-and-twenty, and had remained in it for forty years, in which I may call a state of siege from maidens and widows, but had held out gallantly, and was at length pronounced impregnable. He was rallied of course, about this and that rustic beauty, but he only replied with a good-humored laugh, or the modest confession that "that he was not good enough for her." I used to think this answer of the honest farmer worthy of Macchiavelli, of whom in all probability he had never so much as heard. The objection in question has, of course, been made before, but always with the intention of winning the lady to use it as a means of escape was a stroke of genius, and I am not sure but that it would stand a man in good stead even in a case of breach of promise marriage.

Her, my lord judge, Heaven knows, but I felt I was not worthy of her. There is a serious obligation about it, reminding one of the Decalogue, and also a pathetic touch suggesting an inscription on a tombstone. There were features about the man that called to me the characteristics of Tennyson's "Millionaire" he had a "wise smile," which would doubtless have been "dry," had circumstances admitted of it, and which seemed "half within and half without, and full of dealings with the world." For with all his quiet geniality, Mr. Foracre knew how to take care of himself. In Wiltshire we are not fond of strangers; we are a simple race—some people even call us "moon"—and apt to imagine that outsiders wish to take advantage of us; and in the first instance the honest young farmer was by no means received with open arms. His modest ambition was to take a small farm in the district, the whole of which belongs to

the Duke of Gramplan, and he applied to Lawyer Smart, the Duke's steward and managing man, with this object.

Now Mr. Smart was not a person to let land go out of his hands to any man without good warrant not only of his solvency, but of his ability, and it was always rather a matter of surprise how this applicant obtained his first footing. For, to tell the honest truth, Foracre was not a good farmer, in an agricultural sense, though mostly, as I have shown, as good as gold. He was not sound upon the theory of rotation of the crops; he used little guano, and seldom employed machinery; and though he was far from an idle man, he took little rest easily. He did not rise with the lark, or brush "with busy steps the dew away, to meet the sun upon the upland lawn." If he ever made an appointment of that kind, he never kept it; but, at the same time, he always spoke with respect both of his farming and early rising. Indeed, he spoke with respect of everything except of ponies and Disenters, who happened to be the two classes which Mr. Smart held in highest reprobation; and it was whispered that it was the young fellow's artless sympathy that won the land-steward over to let him have the little farm. He paid his rent very punctually for several years, and by no means mismanaged the place, but he could scarcely be said to have improved it; and he was understood that the Duke would have been surprised to find him in the neighborhood was considerable when another farm, much larger and more valuable, was entrusted to him. It was well known that there was a limit to the distance that was agreed upon by the Duke's steward, Mr. Smart; and, moreover, on the occasions when he and Mr. Foracre, now a middle-aged man, but of course much his junior, met in one another's society, there was not any undue deference observable on the latter's part. Indeed, judging from what I myself saw of them, the inference was rather on the other side, which was certainly remarkable. For, next to the Duke of Gramplan, his land-steward thought he was but a country attorney, was as his Grace's representative, perhaps the most powerful man in the country, and was looked up to by those whom he could favor accordingly.

I remember the man well, for he was my uncle the rector's lawyer and more than once have I ridden over his fields as parading to a Barton, where he lived, with documents for him from my relative. He had a good house looking on the street, with a large garden in its rear, and quite independent of the "office" establishment, with which, however, he was connected, and a recollect, boy as I was, how it surprised me once to see Farmer Foracre come out of the former part of the edifice one day like a goat and an equal.

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My uncle raised his eyebrows when I told him of it, as though he could not make it out; for Mr. Foracre had no daughter, and no son, and no other pulled-out ministers of storm and wind to produce unpleasantness. As I grew older he became a rustic divinity who dispensed syllabus in an orchard. (I have never tested it since, nor even thought of it since the paper in which the other day the paper of the Syllabus, which I do not believe to be half so nice.) And when I got to be a man, and lost my illusions, this good farmer still remained to me as one of the noblest works of Providence within my limited horizon.

From what I have said as to his unruffled temper and sanguine views it will be gathered that Mr. Foracre was a bachelor. He had come as a stranger into our district when he was a young fellow of four-and-twenty, and had remained in it for forty years, in which I may call a state of siege from maidens and widows, but had held out gallantly, and was at length pronounced impregnable. He was rallied of course, about this and that rustic beauty, but he only replied with a good-humored laugh, or the modest confession that "that he was not good enough for her." I used to think this answer of the honest farmer worthy of Macchiavelli, of whom in all probability he had never so much as heard. The objection in question has, of course, been made before, but always with the intention of winning the lady to use it as a means of escape was a stroke of genius, and I am not sure but that it would stand a man in good stead even in a case of breach of promise marriage.

Her, my lord judge, Heaven knows, but I felt I was not worthy of her. There is a serious obligation about it, reminding one of the Decalogue, and also a pathetic touch suggesting an inscription on a tombstone. There were features about the man that called to me the characteristics of Tennyson's "Millionaire" he had a "wise smile," which would doubtless have been "dry," had circumstances admitted of it, and which seemed "half within and half without, and full of dealings with the world." For with all his quiet geniality, Mr. Foracre knew how to take care of himself. In Wiltshire we are not fond of strangers; we are a simple race—some people even call us "moon"—and apt to imagine that outsiders wish to take advantage of us; and in the first instance the honest young farmer was by no means received with open arms. His modest ambition was to take a small farm in the district, the whole of which belongs to

the Duke of Gramplan, and he applied to Lawyer Smart, the Duke's steward and managing man, with this object.

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