

We'n Getten Caught!

A WET CHIPPING HAYTIME.

The summer of 1989 was ideal for making hay, but such summers are not normal. This could be the scene at almost any time between 1850 and 1950 ---



Farmer - "Aah, we're reight glad to see thi, George, Aa'd begun to think as tha'd nod torn up. Now let's get owd Dolly into t'cart and get to work. We's appen get a two o'three load afore dark." "Howd on a bit," says George, "Ahm out o' puff wi' strugglin' up yon broo after a day at'fact'ry. We can't just stan' an' watch'clouds go by, an listen to t'curlews at ar shop, tha knows." "But we have to watch t'clouds," replied Farmer, "An't'curlew moans when it's bahn to rain."

But Farmer's Missis soon cut short the chatter. "Get yoked up, afore t'clouds get any blacker. Ah've putten t'kettle on, an ah'll bring a bit o baggin down t'meadow, an 'appen 'elp ye load a bit."

"Steady now," said Farmer, as he backed Dolly between the cart shafts. George (who was on the other side of the horse) passed the back-chain over the well-greased groove in her saddle. Farmer hooked it up, saying "two off in front, an' three behind." This was to tell George how to adjust the chains with which Dolly controlled the cart. Two spare links were to be left in the hame chains (which coupled the horse's collar to the shafts), and three spare links in the breeching (the wide strap behind the horse's thighs which allowed Dolly to reverse). The yoking-up was completed by passing the belly-band under the horse and fastening it to the shafts (which prevented the cart from tipping up backwards) and hooking up the legs which had supported the cart shafts. They kicked away the scotches from the wheels, Farmer put a foot on the hub of his wheel and swung up into the cart, and George led Dolly down the meadow. "Ah see ye've greased yer axles at last," he shouted, as the wheels knocked merrily with each lurch of the cart. But the ground was not hard, and the wide iron rims of the wheels were wet with the water pressed out of the damp soil.

And so they reached the bottom corner of the meadow, where Aunt Polly and the children had been working since a drying breeze sprang up just before mid-day. First they had rolled over the big hay-cocks so that the wind could reach the damp undersides. Then they returned for dinner, and for Farmer's opinion. After thumping his weather-glass he decided "Aye, break it out. It's bin cut a three-week, so we connot wossen it." So Aunt Polly and the children had started by the hedge, throwing all the cocks abroad roughly before "strawing" the hay out carefully, being sure to well shake out any damp sops on top of the dry. After a turning with rakes, Farmer had decided that it was fit to row up into "plecks"(big rows) ready for "leading"(carting), and it was at this stage when the cart arrived, just at the same time as Missis with the big flat butter-basket and a two-gallon can of tea.

It was too damp to sit down, but everyone squat round the basket and 'reached-to'. George took a bite and gasped "Bai-gum! but this is strong cheese!" "Oh-aye," said Farmer, "We allus keep one back for hay-time. This might be near a year old. There's a deal more power i' ripe cheese." "I did bring some eggs and some bread," said Missis, "just in case - - an' there's plenty wi' damson jam in." And as the basket and the can emptied, memories returned of previous hay-times. Aunt Polly was pleased that Farmer had spread the "tank" (liquid manure from the shippon) more carefully this year, so as not to make thick stripes of lush wet grass across the meadow. "We can do nowt wi that sort i' slattery weather." "Ah, that reminds me o't'tale - - " mused Farmer. But he got no further, because Missis gathered up the mugs and ordered the men back to work.