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Realities of Farming

*Family Farm. By F. D. Smith and
Barbara Wilcox. (Black. 7s. 6d.)*

By H. E. BATES

Are you attracted by three acres and a cow? Do you aspire, as the young townsman in this book aspires, to a nice compact farm, in a ring fence, good soil with plenty of sun, and sound outbuildings? Good water supply, of course, and hard roads? Do you fancy, in these days of the powdered egg, the powdered milk, and the dehydrated carcass, a life where eggs are fresh and warm, milk rich and creamy as the month of May, and young lamb as juicy as spring grass? Finally, while hating your warm bed on cold mornings, the comforts of running water, hard pavements, and town sanitation, do you like your summer working day to be eighteen hours long and your winter working day to begin, accompanied by snow, frost, and rain, in the middle of the night? If so, and you are quite sure about it, this is your book.

Our generation has seen many fairly nonsensical books about the countryside, but Smith and Wilcox have not written them. Their "Living in the Country" was, and will probably remain for a long time, the perfect hard-headed guide to country life. In the grim, cool, and determined language of experience it took every man's dream of a cottage in the country, and from it blew away the morning dew.

"Family Farm" is just as sound, is based just as firmly on the soil, and is just as valuable; but Smith and Wilcox, restrained perhaps by the eulogies showered by Cabinet Ministers on the flourishing state of agriculture, and again perhaps not have allowed the dew, ever so slightly, to settle again. This time they do not set out, every page a wet blanket, to show you the shortest rural cuts to bankruptcy. They are content to paint for you a picture of their Cotswold family farm. They work most of this farm themselves; they have about thirty cows, a bull and a bull-calf, two horses, some ducks and hens, two geese, a jealous gander, some ferrets, and a piglet; they have tractors; they grow corn, potatoes, and roots; they make silage, hay, and cider. They live in modest comfort, are happy, and, in spite of all their hard-headedness, frankly do not know whether they make a profit or not.

Their picture of all this—the farming year, the local market, their neighbours, the eternal business of fecundity—is really excellent. It is as clear as morning on the hills; as ripe and humorous as the tap-room on market day; as stimulating and real as the smell of muck.