

Cow-Pats

- 1 My father was a cow-cocky, but he couldn't make cow cockying pay. It was because of the mortgages. He had to get the County Council to give him work on the roads, and until my elder brothers got fed up and cleared off to town he'd make them go out and get work too. It meant that mother and we younger children had to do a fair bit of work on the farm, but of course we didn't know any other sort of life. Anyhow we managed to stick on the farm.
- 2 We had to get up early to milk, but we didn't think we were hardly done by. As I've said, we didn't know any other sort of life.
- 3 But what sticks in my mind are the seasons when our boots wouldn't be any too good. Sometimes they'd leak so much that mother'd tell us we'd be better off if we didn't wear them at all. Of course some mornings there'd be a frost, and our feet would be pretty cold by the time we'd got the cows into the yard. But one of my brothers found out a good way of warming his feet up. He stuck them into a cow-pat that had just been dropped, and he said it made his feet feel bosker and warm. So we all stuck our feet into cow-pats, and after walking over the frost it was bosker and warm sure enough. Mother wasn't too shook on our doing it at first, but afterwards she didn't mind. So on cold mornings we'd watch out, and whenever a cow dropped a nice big pat we'd race for it, and the one who got there first wouldn't let the others put their feet in.
- 4 Then there was the season when mother had to have a spell. She was absolutely done up, and had to go into town for a week's holiday, and

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as I was the youngest father let me go too. We stayed at the Lion Hotel, which was kept by my Uncle Sam; and Uncle Sam let us stay there for a week for nothing.

- 5 Well, it was after we'd come back from town that I turned up my nose at those cow-pats, and wouldn't put my feet in one no matter how cold it was. My brothers reckoned I thought I'd come back from town a bit too flash for a trick like that. That wasn't the reason, though. No, while we were staying at the hotel I'd seen something that I was holding my tongue over.
- 6 All during the week at the hotel I'd be up early, as most kids that age usually are, even if they don't have to milk cows. I'd play round the front door while the porter was washing the steps, and I'd ask him what he did this, that and the other thing for. But most of his answers didn't half satisfy me. Then one morning just as the porter was finishing the steps an old man came along the street and asked if he could warm his hands up in the bucket of water. The porter said, Sure, so the old man put his hands in the water and kept them there until they were warm.
- 7 Well, that was something I understood without having to ask any questions. Perhaps it's stopped me from asking a good many questions in my life. I believe it's correct to say you get the best answers out of life if you don't ask any questions.
- 8 Of course, after so many years I don't look at it in quite the same way. While you're alive you naturally want to keep yourself warm, and it doesn't matter much how you do it. But at that age to see an old man who might be glad of a few cow-pats to warm himself up in was somehow a bit too much for me.

Frank Sargeson