

MUSINGS OF AN 18TH CENTURY BERWICKSHIRE FARMER (Scots)

Ah'm aye oot i' the mornin' afore the cock craws. But ma guidwife Jean is whiles up afore me, sortin' oot the fire.

First ah gan tae fettle the coos. They're tied up ower the nicht, an' ah pit them oot on the ootbye grund tae get some gress. This year, I've only got fower coos. Ah micht hae tae len' a couple frae ma neebor when ah'm ready tae ploo.

Then, efter a keek at the hens tae see if there's ony eggs, ah'm back tae the hoose for ma brose. If Jean's been bakin' on the stane, ah micht get a bit bannock as weel.

Ah'll be ready tae ploo in a couple o' weeks, for the grund's still clatchy efter the wunter. Ah share the plooin' wi' twae o' ma neebors. Ah use the same ploo that ma faither did, an' his faither afore him. It's a muckle heavy thing, an' we need six beasts tae haul it. Ma neebor Tam has a couple o' horses, an' oo can tie them up tae the ploo, wi' ma coos ahint them.

Tam tells me that his neebor on the other side, name o' Hutton, is tryin' new things wi' his land. Ah dinnae ken him awfy weel, cos he's awa' a lot, but he seems a canny lad. He's got himsel' a new-fangled ploo, that just needs twae horses tae pu' it! An' he's got a new plooman as weel, a lad frae way doon sooth. Tam cannae unnerstan' a word he says, but they get on fine.

Onyways, he started plooin' last month. His grund's a wheen dryer than mine. Tam tells me that he's plooin' across the rigs, tae fletten them! Ma faither'll be turnin' in his grave. Then, Tam says, he's pittin' some stuff ca'd marl on tae the land tae help things grow better. Ah'd best keep an ee on whit's gan on, tae see if ah can larn onythin'. Oo've aye deen things the auld wye, but mebbe there's anither wye, that's better.

English translation

I'm always out in the morning before the cock crows. But my wife Jean is sometimes up before me, lighting the fire.

First I go to tend to the cows. They are tied up overnight, and I put them out onto the outbye ground, to get some grass. This year, I've got four cows. I might have to borrow two from my neighbour when I'm ready to plough.

Then, after looking in at the hens to see if they've laid any eggs, I'm back to the house for breakfast. I usually have oatmeal broth, but if Jean's been baking, I can have some bannock as well.

I'll be ready to plough in a couple of weeks, for the ground is still heavy and wet after the winter. I share the ploughing with two of my neighbours. I use the same plough that my father did, and his father before him. It's big and heavy, and we need six beasts to haul it. My neighbour Tam has two horses, and we can harness them, with my four cows behind, to the plough.

Tam tells me that his neighbour on the other side, Mr Hutton, is trying new ideas on this land. I don't know him very well, because he's away from the farm a lot, but he seems a nice enough chap. He's got a new design of plough that needs just two horses to pull it! And he's got a new ploughman as well, a man from the south of England. Tam can't understand a word he says, but they get on well.

He started ploughing last month. His ground's a bit dryer than mine. Tam tells me that he's ploughing across the ridges, to flatten them! My father will be turning in his grave. Then, Tam says, he's putting something called marl on his land, to make the soil more fertile. I'd better keep an eye on what's going on, to see if I can learn anything. I've always done things the old way, but maybe there's another way that's better.