

## A DAY IN THE LIFE OF W..L.A. Member No. 18185

It had been a hot day, another in a prolonged spell of glorious weather that gave the month her reputation of 'flaming' June. A day to spend lazing on some golden stretch of sand, with an occasional splash in the sea.

I had spent the last hours of the morning in the hayfield, perched high on the swathe-turner, with an armful of selected hay as a cushion on the iron seat. When first promoted to this task I had been given detailed instructions, but soon learned that Jolly, my horse, knew the job by heart. As long as I did not let his head drop low enough to snatch at the sweet-smelling hay on either side, the task was performed satisfactorily and with the minimum of effort on my part. To-day had been no exception. Jolly plodded up and down the rows wearing a peculiar head-dress of leafy twigs which I had stuck into his bridle in the faint hope that they would help keep away the flies which always swarmed about his head in warm weather. The tines on the wheels revolved and tossed the drying hay, disturbing insects and seeds to float like a small dust storm in our wake.

High overhead, invisible against the brightness of the sky, larks were bursting with rapturous song. Caught up in the glory I, too, began to sing, but Jolly was used to such nonsense and serenely stumped on.

After lunch, with the sun now blazing down, I was again riding behind Jolly, but this time on a large dray. On either side of the cart a man was gathering up a row of hay and, when each had a sufficient truss on his fork, he would drop the load on the cart. They were very good and took great trouble to put the hay in a strategic position so that I hardly needed to touch it at first but, as the load grew higher, it became more difficult to place each truss precisely. I found myself wading through the hay from side to side and back to front of the cart, in desperate endeavour to keep the loading even so that the whole lot would not slide, slowly and ignominiously, off the cart while being jolted down the cobbled track to the rick-yard.

The soft, yielding hay tired my legs as I struggled over it - it was that nightmare of trying to run away from something dreadful and my legs were made of lead. My arms grew ever more weary. Seeds and prickly stems trickled down my neck and stuck to my shirt which, in turn, stuck to my sweat-soaked skin. My beetroot-red face was shiny and smudged with dust. My hair, tied in a cotton turban, clung lank and damp to my scalp. The smell of the hay, so sweet from a distance, was now overpowering and nauseous, my dust-caked throat ached for a drink, and I felt this was Hell. The glory of the morning was forgotten completely.

At last the load was pronounced finished and I somehow had to climb down from the dray on trembling legs. When I reached it, nothing felt firmer than terra. It was considered proper for the loader to inspect the load before it went off so, with assumed nonchalance, I walked round and felt greatly surprised to find it looked

fairly stable. Pronouncing myself satisfied, (with an inward prayer for its safe arrival), I sent the cart on its way then thankfully gulped down half a pint of cider before climbing on to a second cart to start the agony all over again.

So time wore on and the field was slowly cleared. When the last load was taken down to the yard I was spread on top of it, heedless of its stability or appearance. At the rick-yard I could climb down a decent ladder instead of that under-slung fence-like contraption at the front of the dray. But I would not have cared if the journey had gone on forever, it was so good just to lie there and know that Hell had closed for the day.

Walking back to the house for supper, with the rooks returning to the elms in eight-acre and my shadow ridiculously elongated before me, I could begin to forget the fatigue and remember only the satisfaction of a job well done. All around me, in the golden glow of evening, small creatures were preparing to rest. We had had a busy time. Lie on a beach? What a waste of a lovely day.