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THEY THINNED OUT THEIR ORCHARDS

Town and Country Life 2000 Years Ago

'Twas the same old life, in many ways, that we live to-day.

"I see great changes going on ivry day of me life, but I see no change ivry fifty years."

Right you are, Mr. Dooley, and you could have added in all truthfulness that, in many basic respects, 'twas the same old life in city, town, village and country two thousand years ago as is lived to-day right here in new America.

Of course, there was no iron horse thundering over the earth two thousand years ago. Travelers by foot and horse had not yet been scared half out of their wits by the tooting automobile. A red schoolhouse did not sit in every valley. The convenience of rural free delivery was still to be invented; so, also, the reaper, the telephone, the threshing machine, the telegraph. But "man's a man for a' that," has been from the beginning, will doubtless be so to the end, and hence, just as the life we live is similar in many ways to that of two thousand years ago, so it will bear numerous striking resemblances to the life led by our descendants in 3906 A. D.

Cuneiform writings, which have been recovered from ancient Babylon and other long-buried cities, prove beyond the shadow of doubt the similarity between city life of to-day and of yesterday. Papyri and other personal and public documents recently recovered from Egyptian sand, in and about the site of ancient Oxyrhynchus, a Greco-Roman colony, one hundred and forty miles south of Cairo, that had long been in a flourishing condition when Joseph fled with Mary and the child Jesus into Egypt, furnish equally indisputable proofs of similarities of town and country life then and now.

There are the private letters of Lucius Bellemus Gemellus, for example.

Gemellus, it seems, after he was honorably discharged from his legion—Egypt was then under Roman rule—took to farming for a livelihood. But, like many men of to-day, he made his home in town, whence he ran his various farms by written instructions and personal visits.

"I blame you greatly for the loss of two pigs owing to the fatigue of the journey, when you had ten animals fit for work," he wrote in Greek, which was the vernacular of the colony, to a nephew, evidently in direct charge of one of the farms. "Heraclides, the donkey driver, shifted the blame from himself, saying that you had told him to drive the pigs on foot."

Poor nephew, by name Epagathus! He doubtless felt very badly on receipt of that letter, but had he not so instructed the Egyptian donkey driver with the Greek name the world of to-day would probably be ignorant of the fact that pigs were carried, as well as driven to market, two thousand years ago.

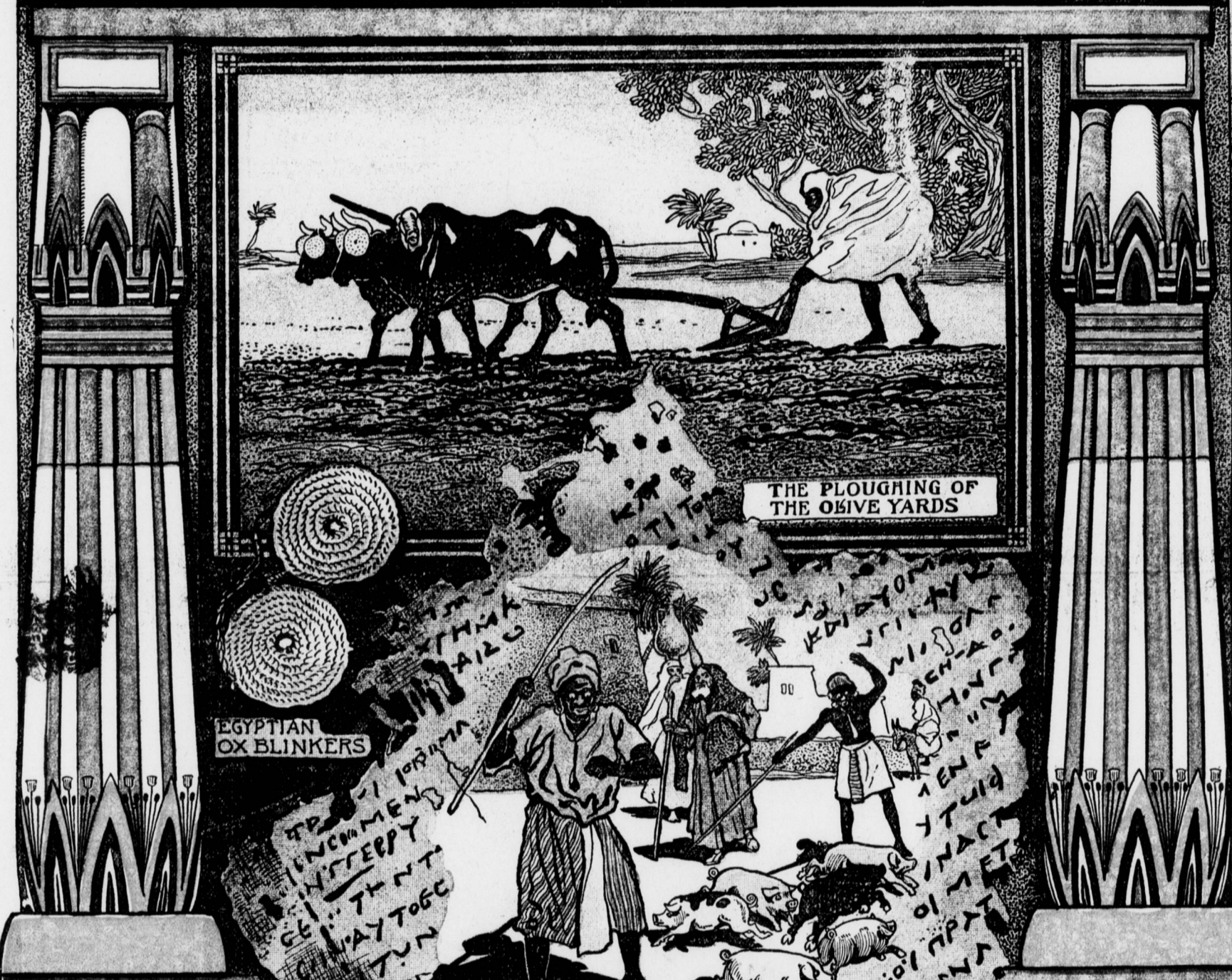
In another letter to Epagathus, Gemellus voices his irritation over the slowness with which the farm work is progressing:

"Please carry forward the digging of the olive yards and their plowing up and hoeing, and plow up and hoe the fallows, and urge the driver to do his proper work every day. Up to to-day you have not harvested the field at Apas, but have neglected it, and so far have only harvested half. Wherefore, I blame you."

The trick of thinning out an orchard or a piece of woodland was well understood.

"You will oblige me," writes Gemellus, "by sending Pindarus to me at the town; for Hermonax has asked me to let him take him to Kerkesucha to look to his olive yard (orchard), as it is overgrown; and he wishes to cut down some trees so that those which are to be cut down may be cut skillfully."

"Morning," says Farmer Smith to his neighbor Jones; "I wonder if you'd let John come over and give me a lift on



THE PLOUGHING OF THE OLIVE YARDS

EGYPTIAN OX BLINKERS

ANCIENT EGYPTIAN HOE AND SICKLE

WOODEN RAKE

"I BLAME YOU GREATLY FOR THE LOSS OF TWO PIGS"

the load of wheat I want to take to town to-day."

Gemellus was a great believer in manure as a fertilizer. In one letter he admonished his nephew to keep adding to the manure heap, and in another he gives these directions:

"Send the animals to carry manure at the vegetable ground (truck garden) at Psinacis, and the manure carts, for Pasis is crying out that we must not allow it to be dissolved by the water; and let them fetch his hay."

That one had to watch sharp to keep from being "stuck" in a deal, still another of Gemellus' epistolary efforts make plain:

"Aunes, the donkey driver, has bought a rotten bundle of hay at 12 drachmae, a little bundle and rotten hay, the whole of it decayed—no better than dung."

Gemellus had a married daughter, Gemella. She had a son whom the grandfather affectionately termed "the little one." He took great pleasure in planning a birthday party for the child and another for his daughter, ordering fowl, sucking pigs, olives, and other delicacies to be sent in from his farms. He had a sharp tongue and did not hesitate to use it when he felt inclined. "Don't talk nonsense about the threshing," and "what you write me about neglecting the building, you have said more than enough," he wrote his son, in charge of a farm. Fortunately, however, for his twentieth century reputation, his softer side is revealed in his birthday party

plans, his observance of religious festivals, and his taking "the little one" to the city for a few days of wondrous sight-seeing.

Several of the papyri show that it was the common practice for one farmer to loan seed to another less fortunate than he.

"I, Petheus, son of Patron, acknowledge the direct receipt from Aeusilaus, son of Theon, of two and a half artabae

of vegetable seed, new, pure, and undiluted, and of six and a half artabae of barley; and I will repay the whole in the month of Pauni of the present thirty-eighth year of Caesar at Pelusium, measured with a quarter measure. And if I do not repay I will forfeit for each artaba of vegetable seed ten artabae, and for the barley—"

The rest of the receipt (or is it a promissory note?) is missing; nor is it

known whether or not Petheus, son of Patron, was able to repay the loan at the end of the stipulated four months and thus escaped the heavy penalty named for failure so to do.

Once in awhile there was an owner of a farm who had no difficulty in keeping the same tenant year in and year out:

"Didymus, also called Matrona, daughter of Asclepiades, to Heron, son of Satabous, cultivator, greeting. I have received from you the rent for the twenty-second year of my plot which you cultivate, two and a quarter artabae, the tax of an artaba and the naubion being payable by you, Heron."

Perhaps the town drunkard has existed ever since there was a town and intoxicants. At any rate, he was a staple character around Oxyrhynchus two thousand years ago, and his favorite method of getting money wherewith to secure the one thing his heart craved for most was to clip coins. Here is the letter of one town drunkard to a cory in his cups:

"Endaemon to Longinus, greeting: I entreat you, sir, to hasten to me and bring, if you please, the crystal (instrument) and we can clip the cash. If you will, you will be able to strain me some good Marseotic wine, when you come, with the proceeds."

In all probability the letter was written in some grog shop of the day.

The highway robber also plied his trade whenever he got a chance:

"To Megalonymus, strategus (inspector) of the divisions of Themistes and Polemo in the Arsinoite nome (district), from Pasion, son of Heraclides, and Onesimus, son of Ammonius, both pig merchants of the metropolis. Yesterday, as we were returning from the village of Theadelphia, about dawn we have attacked halfway between Polydenia and Theadelphia by robbers, who bound us and assaulted us with many blows, and wounded Pasion, and robbed us of a pig and carried off Pasion's tunic. Wherefore, we entreat you to register it, in order that when the culprits are discovered we may bring charges against them on these counts."

Is it your impression that the guarantee is a modern business device? Then

let it be corrected at once!

"Mystharion, son of Heron, aged about forty years, having a scar on the little finger of the left hand, agrees that he has sold to Satabous, son of Pekusis, aged about thirty years, having a scar on the little finger of the left hand, a female mouse-colored donkey, shedding its first teeth, just as it is irrevocably, and that Mystharion has received from Satabous the price agreed upon between them, fifty-six drachmae of silver, directly from hand to hand out of his house, and that he will guarantee the sale with every guarantee."

Would not any man of to-day, similarly situated as Pasis was two thousand years ago, pen a letter after the fashion of this one, which he evidently sent to a resident of a neighboring town:

"Pasis to Heraclides, greeting: Whenever you from necessity want to borrow anything from me, I at once give it to you; and now please give to Cleon the three staters which Seleucus told you to give me, even if you have to pawn your cloak; for I have settled accounts with his father, but he has allowed me to remain in arrears, and now I want to get a receipt. Seleucus has evaded paying the money by saying that you have made an arrangement with him to pay instead. Now, therefore, please consider that you are lending the money to me, and don't keep Cleon waiting, but go and meet him. On no account fail to do this."

Here is a townsman's invitation to a friend that reads, except for the proper names and the word centurion, as if it were written to-day:

"Isidorus invites you to dine with him on the occasion of his daughter's wedding, at the house of Titus the centurion, at nine o'clock."

The form of making a business proposal by letter has changed scarcely at all, except as regards the style of address and greeting.

"To Achilles, also called Sarapammon, through his guardian Sarapion, from Apollonius, son of Apollinios, son of Soterichus, from the Goose-farm quarter. I wish to lease from you for four years, from the thirtieth of the present month Mesore, of the oil presses owned by you at the village of Dionysias, one oil press in the Harpocrator quarter, fitted with a wheel and containing two machines and a cauldron, with all the appertaining upper rooms, and I will pay each year in all one metretres six choes of strained olive oil, and likewise one metretres six choes of raphanous oil, providing every year at the harvest six cotyle of raphanous oil," etc., after the present fashion of expressing the terms minutely.

Finally, the Oxyrhynchus colony and countryside, white and black alike, were not unacquainted with the spoiled child. Here is the letter of a Greek youngster, who certainly deserved a great many more spankings than his less petted playmates undoubtedly got from time to time:

"Theon, to his father Theon, greeting: It was a fine thing of you not to take me with you to the city. If you won't take me with you to Alexandria I won't write you a letter or speak to you or say good-by to you; and if you go to Alexandria I won't take your hand or ever greet you again. That is what will happen if you won't take me. Mother said to Archelaus: 'It quite upsets him to be left behind.' It was good of you to send me presents on the 12th, the day you sailed. Send me a lyre, I implore you. If you don't, I won't eat, I won't drink. There now."

Yes, Mr. Dooley, though we have many things that these ancients wot not of, though we of city, and town and countryside are vastly superior in many ways to the men and women of city and town and countryside two thousand years ago, still we are the sons and daughters of our fathers and mothers, and you once more revealed your shrewd philosophy when you said:

"I see great changes going on every day of my life, but I see no change every fifty years."