The Farm
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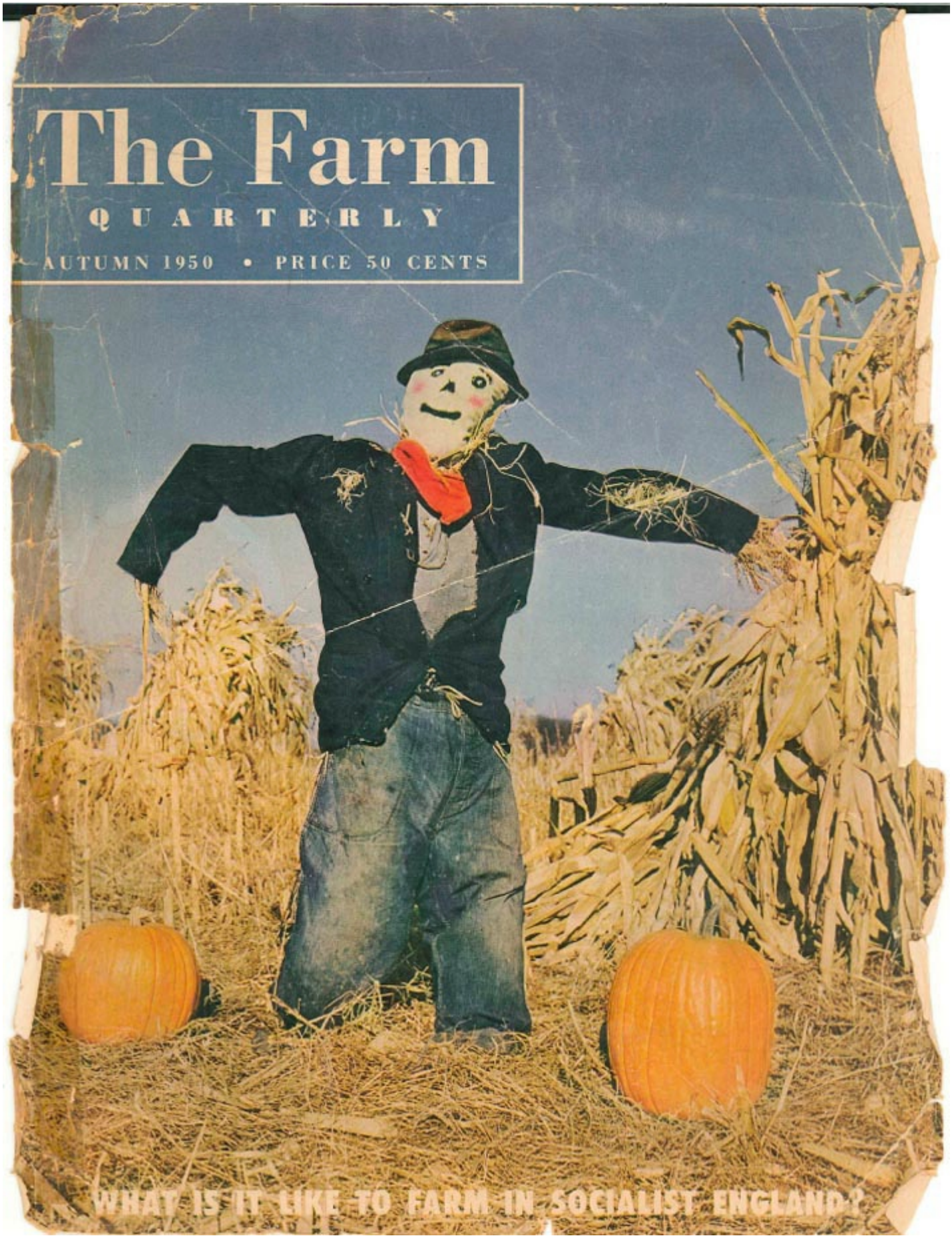
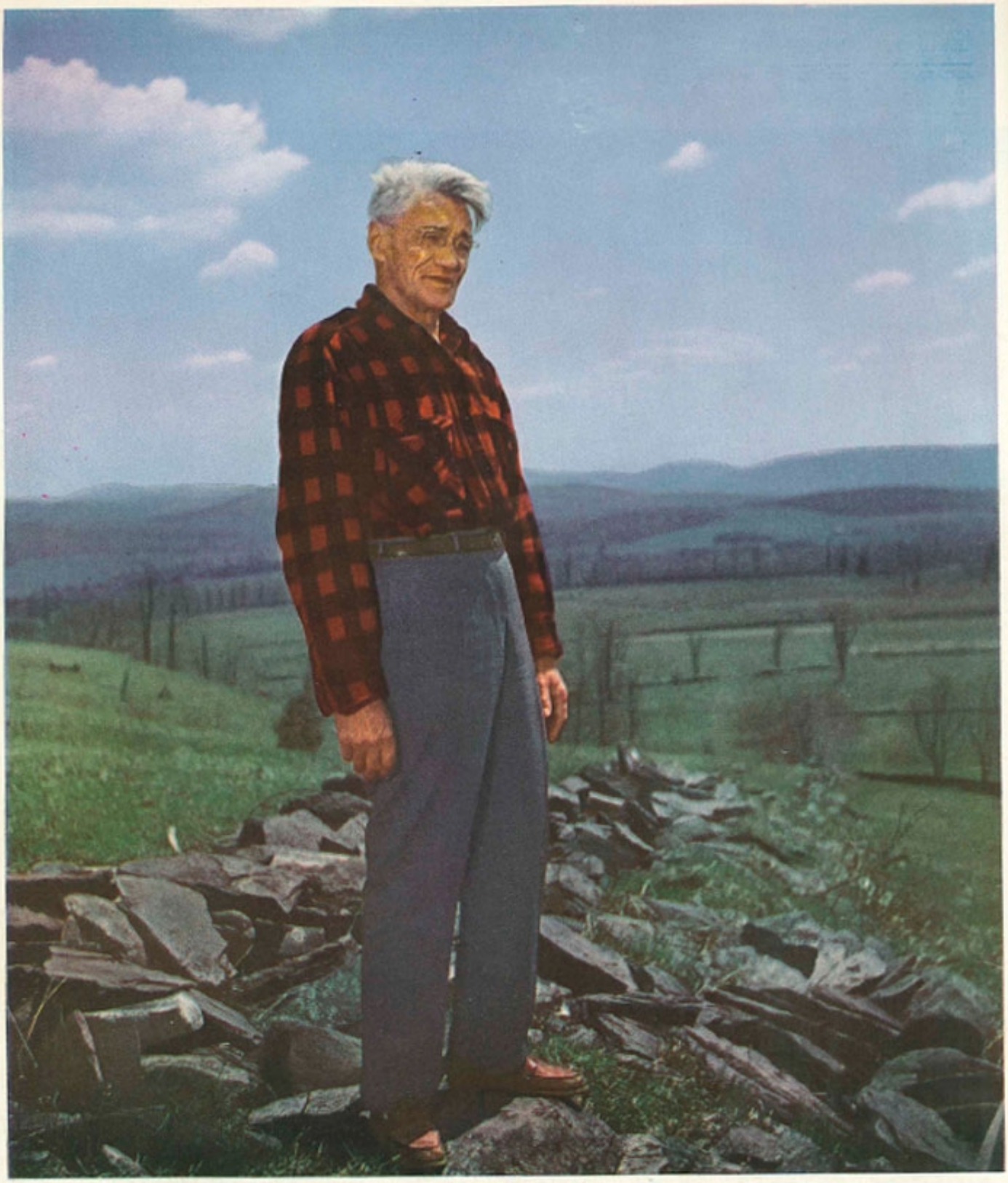


WHAT IS IT LIKE TO FARM IN SOCIALIST ENGLAND?



GEORGE TAYLOR AMONG THE ENEMY in a moment of truce in the century-long battle between the Taylor clan and the rocks. Stone walls once formed a tight grid over the whole farm. When modern machinery came, many had to be torn down to make bigger fields. Disposing of them has been a headache.

Century Farm

BY GEORGE D. TAYLOR

The Taylor Farm was cited by Governor Dewey as a Century Farm. No outside money has gone into this rocky hill-farm which has grown from one hundred to five hundred fertile acres and supported six generations of the family in comfort.

AS Governor Dewey read the citation that listed the Taylor Farm among the Century Farms of New York, there was the implication of individual accomplishment. But I know that Century Farms are not made in any one lifetime.

I remembered the story of my great grandfather plodding along beside his oxcart two hundred miles into the wilderness; and, baffled by that very wilderness, selecting this meagre land site.

I recalled that eighty years later I had seen my grandfather start out in the morning with his black mare and buggy to make a round of neighborly calls, reminding me as he went to do my chores. And I remembered his stalwart sons, my father and my uncles, carrying his casket to the grave on the day of his burial.

I remembered the tremendous vitality and determination of my father; and his practical philosophy and his sacrificial generosity.

There came a picture of 1895—the grasshopper year. I was seven years old. The meadows and pastures were as bare and brown as the road. The only green things the grasshoppers hadn't eaten were the leaves on the trees; so we cut down the trees where

A PICTURE FROM THE FAMILY ALBUM shows Grandfather Taylor, the son of the first owner, and his eleven children and grandchildren posing stiffly on the homestead lawn.

THE PRESENT OPERATORS and future owners, the Henry Daytons, prepare a seedbed for cauliflower, one of the main cash crops. The Daytons operate the farm on a lease with an iron-clad option to buy. She is a fifth generation Taylor.

MANURE MAKES MORE GRASS to feed the cows and start the cycle again. Well over a hundred milk cows provide a regular milk check and enough manure to spread at the rate of six tons to the acre each year. Every fifth year the cauliflower land gets two tons of commercial fertilizer in addition.

both the cows and the hoppers could reach the leaves and let them fight it out.

So many cows were on the market for slaughter that five dollars was the current price for a medium fat one. One day my father had sold a cow to the butcher. I was leading her along the road to the slaughter house when I met a neighbor. Disposed to condolence, he said, "Well, I suppose you'll get five dollars for that one." and I promptly answered: "No, only four." Driving close enough behind to overhear it, my father was badly humiliated at having his poor bargain publicized. He often told the story later, either to illustrate the proverb "children and fools tell the truth," or more likely to point up the desperation of those days. The butcher would pay a hundred dollars for that same cow today.

In moments of vaingloriousness I read an element of idealism into the farm's history; but on sober thought it appears that stubbornness and the lack of initiative have been more dominant. The steady, plodding development of a rocky hill farm in north-eastern New York is a sordid thing. In fact, the recital of the farm's history will not be much more than a commentary on the operation of marginal land.

In the year 1800 that famous historian and traveler, The Reverend Timothy Dwight, then president of Yale, made a trip through New York state. After crossing the more settled areas on the eastern frontier, which contain the lands drained and leveled by the Hudson river and its tributaries, he crossed the mountains toward central New York.

"From Schoharie we entered Blenheim, ascending a mountainous acclivity near three miles in length." he wrote later. "This township, so far as it was visible from the road, we found an almost absolute forest, as we afterward did those of Jefferson and Stamford. I can scarcely conceive that an agreeable residence will ever be found in either of these places."

Into this very rockbound, rugged wilderness, 14 years later, came my great grandfather, a young widower, bringing from Barkhamstead, Connecticut, in his oxcart, two children and his possessions.

His destination was very near the western border of Schoharie county, in the newly established township of Jefferson, and close to the little settlement in Delaware county which later became known as Stamford. A less desirable piece of land than that upon which he lighted could not have been found in either of the two counties—a rocky hilly tract, interspersed with swamps and ravines, almost totally unavailable for cultivation, and containing not more than one hundred acres.

A living is always to be made by those who are smart enough to make a wise selection of opportunity. My great grandfather was not smart. He did not make a wise selection. But having got into it, he determined, not only to make the best

NEW TILLAGE METHODS are used to fight the rocks. Henry Dayton, who once piloted a B-24, drives a rotary tiller over the rocky soil. Occasionally tines are broken, but individual clutches permit the different sets of tines to slip and pass over big stones. With the hood up, the rocks fall on the surface; with it down, they are buried.

of it, but to make it produce what he wanted. This stoical doctrine has been the crux of the thing for all of us through four more generations.

The Stone Age

Though there was the primary task of timber and stump clearing, the chief obstacles to physical progress here have always been rocks and stones. In fact the whole history of The Taylor Farm is a story of rocks and stones—big rocks, medium rocks, loose rocks, fast rocks, shelly rocks, and boulders, and stones, stones, stones; stones on top of the ground, stones in the top soil, stones in the sub-soil. It is a story of crowbars, splitting wedges and sledges, of gunpowder and dynamite, and of chains, and oxen and horses and tractors, and of stoneboats and sleds and loose bottom wagons, of dump wagons and dump trucks. But most of all, it is a story of abdominal muscles!

Every physical contact with the land for any purpose has always been immediately and inescapably involved with a rock or a stone. In later years, I have often smiled as I watched the men lift and strain getting the big rocks out of the way, when I heard them grumble: "Why in hell did they ever take this land away from the Indians?" But then, as I turned away, I overheard them say: "His grandfather must have been crazy" and the terrible mistake of the whole thing sobered me. Timothy Dwight had been right in the first place. But it was too late to change; we Taylors have always got so far in that we couldn't afford to back out.

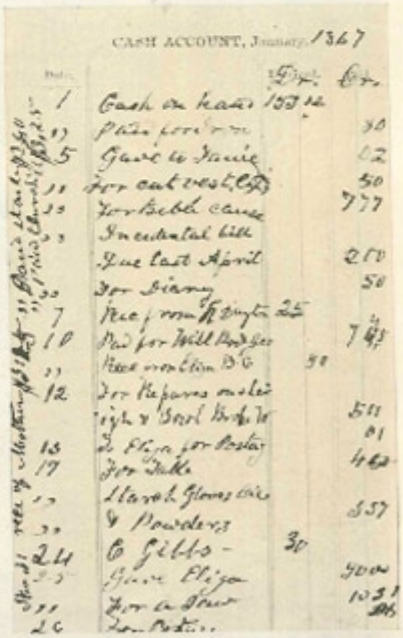
My great grandfather's first undertakings were to clear up small fields of three to six acres. Since fences were needed for boundaries and for the control of stock, it was a smart idea to use the stones in making walls, thus killing two birds, literally, with one stone. A slow laborious process, with oxen and stoneboats and crowbars, this fencing plan was finally almost fully carried out until, as I first remember it a little more than fifty years ago, the farm was a multitude of small walled enclosures. Though the land area had not then grown beyond one half a square mile, there were about 28 lineal miles of stone wall enclosing more than sixty small fields. For nearly one hundred years—three full generations, off season lulls had provided no leisure. There was always a new field to clear, and a new stone wall to build.

Little realized at the time, this accomplishment turned out to be no more than a beginning. In fact it was a forerunner of tragedy for, before we got through with it, the walls had to be moved again to make way for modern tools.

Making a Living

Somehow, in spite of this terrific early resistance, and perhaps, because he insisted on a superior standard of living for his family, my great grandfather managed to build up a farm economy of almost complete self sufficiency. The implements of good living could not then be bought on the installment plan, not even real money could have brought them into this remote place. They had to be produced; so he produced them in great array.

There was flax and wool for housekeeping and for clothes. There were hides tanned for shoes. There were wheat and


CASH ACCOUNT, January 1867

A PENNY TO ELIZA for postage, or two cents for Fanie, were faithfully recorded in the cash book by Grandfather Taylor in 1867.

THE STATELY HOMESTEAD, trimmed of its Victorian gingerbread, stands as a monument to the first Taylor who bought the farm and built this house.

THE UNWELCOME HARVEST of rocks, a truck-load from a ten acre field, still continues after one hundred and thirty years of cultivation and stone removal. This is one crop that never runs out on the steep Taylor hills.

rye and buckwheat to be ground into flour for bread and cakes. There was pork and veal and mutton and beef to eat. There were vegetables galore, in season and stored for winter. There were apples in great quantity, and pears and crabapples and plums, and berries of all kinds. There was wood for fuel stored in ample supply a year ahead. There were logs for lumber to build what was needed. There was tallow for candles, and grease and ashes for soap. There was maple sugar and molasses for eating and cooking. There was milk and cream and butter from the cows. And there was apple juice—I suspect it was strictly for vinegar—and clear cold water from the well to drink.

Outside, there was hay and grain for the horses and the sheep and the cattle. There was corn and buckwheat for the hens, and some extra for the mice and rats. And, most useful of all, there was always manure to mix with the stones to insure the growth of next year's crops, and thus complete the cycle of production.

Near the end of his active career, and as his culminating achievement, my great grandfather built himself a house. Without major external change or enlargement, it has now become old in the service of his progeny. After his manner, its lines are simple and modest; but it has proved sturdy, and it still stands upright.

My grandfather's advent into the proprietorship of the farm was almost precluded by a boyish encounter with our traditional enemy. A stone, which he had cast at a straying cow, hit a rock and glanced backward, striking and seriously wounding his leg just below the knee. Infection set in after a little and, in the judgment of a council of doctors, amputation was ordered to save his life. The next day the doctors came again with their tools and their bandages. My great grandfather was in the far field across the brook digging rocks. The horn was blown as a signal for him to come in.

What he thought about on the way home is not recorded, but when he came in the house he said to the doctors, "Take your tools and go home. I'll not have a crippled boy." Miraculously, or perhaps by providential intervention, my grandfather got well. He spent his life, with a slight limp, on two good legs.

The Taylors won that battle with the rocks, and sometimes I think my great grandfather's decision that day, on the way to the house, was prompted by his unwillingness to admit defeat at the hands of a rock. Concievably my grandfather's recovery was God's way of saying He would see us through if we kept up the fight. But as I look ahead at the still unconquered rocks here, it seems that He'll have a pretty long view of it.

My grandfather's province was not much more than the turning of a new furrow into the channel left by the preceding one. Though the raw edges of primitive life were disappearing, self-sufficiency was still the key note. The

period of his active life—between 1840 and 1880—was the lull before the stormy confusion of new things which began to deluge the country at the turn of the century. During his life there was almost no farm machinery. There was no telephone. There was no plumbing, nor even running water. Transportation for people and things was horse drawn, and restricted by narrow mud roads in summer and snow drifts in winter.

Little money was involved in the farm operation or in family maintenance. My grandfather's yearly accounts were methodically kept in a little space on the back pages of his diary. In 1871, the entire gross income was $867.23. And a cash balance of $142.63 was carried over at the end of the year, after a conscientious discharge of current debt. This for a family of eleven persons. They did not spend much, but they were well provided for. As each of the nine children went from home, to college, to business and to marriage, a substantial sum was provided to give substance to their venture. My grandfather's family was always his chief concern and his best crop.

To my father, the youngest of the lot, fell the opportunity, or the obligation, to continue the farm enterprise. During his career, with the tremendous growth of urban demands and with the development of deeper penetrating local railroad transportation, the possibilities of commercial farming became evident. For The Taylor Farm, as for many others in this area, New York City's demand for fluid milk has become the dominant factor in the farm economy. With the beginning of dairy farming, and the advent of the monthly milk check, the era of self sufficiency vanished almost overnight.

For more than 50 years we have been

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THE OLDEST TAYLOR plays the melodeon and sings hymns with her great-grandchildren. They represent the third and the sixth generations of Taylors to occupy the farm. Still active at ninety, Mrs. Taylor still cooks and keeps a sharp eye on the farm.