

THE DAY OF THE YEAR - November 14th 1902

by C S Dean

The church clock struck five in the morning. Though still dark it was time to get up, for the great day had arrived. The old hanging lamp was lit and the wick carefully adjusted, together with the tallow candle in the storm lantern. A hurried breakfast of bread and margarine, for there were many chores to be done. With the old leather bellows a flame was kindled and soon the fire was burning with the help of the sticks dried overnight in the oven. The big cast iron kettle hung on a hook over the fire.

Some ten months earlier father had come home with a little squealing pig in a sack. Now he had grown to be an eighteen score pound pig which would feed the family for many days to come. For ten long months we had fed him twice a day. Gathered sacks of pig potatoes, acorns and swill. In an endeavour to satisfy his appetite we had gleaned no less than four sacks of corn and given him the wheat which should have gone to the making of 'frummetry' for the family, that lovely porridge made from the wheat we gleaned. The previous evening the boys had been 'sticking' so as to be free to watch and help, if required the day's proceedings. I should explain 'sticking' was the gathering of dead wood from hedgerows and trees and was a necessity for the kindling of fires. The girls had done extra seaming and chevrons of stockings. One penny was earned for a score of stockings (this helped the family budget). These were taken each day to the 'Fish and Quart' in Churchgate where they were collected by the various factories.

However, five-o'clock it was and much to be done. Fires to light in the kitchen, water to be fetched from the spring. Some twenty bucketsful take a lot of carrying though we had a yoke on our shoulders.

Every sound on the road was familiar to us. Each footstep was associated with certain people, or the hoofs of horses and cartwheels told us who was passing and their trade or business. The crunch of a single wheel on the rough road could only mean one thing – the arrival of the 'pigsticker'. The wheel was soon detached from his bench. His spotless white apron was put on and the tools and knives of his trade laid out in an orderly manner. Instructions were issued and a small procession formed. At the head, the pigsticker with a strong rope, following, two hefty neighbours and in the rear was mother supervising everything. Into the pigsty he went and roped the pig, and after much pulling and tugging was led down to the bench. A deft move by the pigsticker and the pig was hoisted on to the bench, the knife severed the pig's throat and soon the squeals died down.

Now the hot water was required. Scraping the hairs off the skin, the cutting up of the carcass, and the likes. The sides of bacon were laid on the thrawl ready for salting. Hams hung on hooks in the ceiling, but above all the cutting up of the meat according to the neighbours' orders. Brawn, pigs puddings, chitterlings, etc, all was used except the squeal. We children then had to distribute the meat, and hoped to get a little tip. The boys were rewarded with the bladder. After much kneading it was blown up and provided the school football. The only other ball we ever had was made of sacking and tied up with string.

After all the day's work came the bath. The dolly-tub was brought in front of the fire, more water fetched from the spring, and the bathing commenced. The bigger children first down to the smallest. This saved fetching more water as the level in the tub got lower. When all had bathed we gathered round the fire to enjoy real home-made faggots. Real home-

made faggots – the memory of a meal like this still lingers. The smell of the fresh herb flavouring, the fresh meat and the satisfaction of a real meal and warmth soon sent us to bed to sleep and dream. So our day closed with contentment and happy thoughts of the morrow when hot toast and dripping would fortify us at breakfast, and an assured dinner for many days to come.

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