

## THE LARDER AT FERNDALE

The room was long, and narrow and stood to the right of the back door into the old, red brick house. It was entered at one end by a low, wooden door fastened by a wooden latch. A single step down from the door led onto a stone-flagged floor and the only light in the room came from a small window, with leaded panes, set into the right hand wall. At night a search for provisions was made with the aid of a candle in a white enamelled candle-holder edged in dark blue.

The left-hand side of the larder was lined with an assortment of wooden casks each with its wooden tap, resting on their sides on trestle holders. Inside these was an exciting selection of highly intoxicating home-made wines - cowslip, elderberry, dandelion and sloe - the last prone to over-ferment, force out the bung in the cask with a sharp, rifle-like crack, and disgorge its sticky, deep red contents over the floor.

On the right of the door stood an old kitchen table covered with a marble slab where the left-overs of family meals were stored on an assortment of cracked plates covered with basins. This table was also the home of a very large and ornate cheese dish and the wide necked bottles of creamy milk, sealed with plain cardboard discs, and delivered from the farm each morning in a wooden wheelbarrow. Sometimes there would also be, on the slab, 1/2lb of hand churned farm butter fashioned into a domed shape by the farmer's wooden butter mould with its hand carved leaf pattern. Underneath the table were two shiny, galvanised pails. They were filled each morning with clear, sparkling water from the eighty foot well at the bottom of the garden. Beside them, standing on a plate was the white china jug for filling the kettles- Beyond the table and underneath the window was the huge, wooden box storing the sides of bacon which, for many weeks previously, had lain curing on a rack hung from the kitchen ceiling.

Shelves filled the narrow, far end of the larder. The top one was the place where brown glazed basins, filled with lard clarified from pig leaf at the last pig killing, were stood upside down in a neat row. These provided the children's treat - white, crusty bread spread with lard and sprinkled with sugar. Unless, of course, one basin happened to conceal rich brown beef dripping which was delicious when spread with jam. On the remaining shelves rows of jams and pickles were to be found, each covered with a neat circle of brown paper, tied tightly with string and labelled in a firm hand which paid scant attention to spelling.

From this larder, also the treasure store for bees, wasps, mice and, I am sure, a host of micro-organisms, emerged the wherewithal for endless noisy family meals and - when you were old enough - cosy suppers by the fire.