

PRIZE ESSAY.

What Out-Door Work Should Farmers' Wives and Daughters Perform?

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This question is one which admits of a variety of answers. Where help is abundant and household duties light, while outside work presses and the available masculine force is slender, it may be right for the women of the household to take upon themselves occasionally or permanently, any part of the work which their time and physical strength will enable them to undertake. Such work as milking, caring for poultry, and perhaps the garden, should be regulated by the relative amount of work in proportion to the workers necessarily falling respectively to the male and female members of the family. In cases of emergency most women would be willing to help anywhere and everywhere in their power for the general benefit. But in the circumstances in which a majority of our farmers' wives and daughters are placed, the answer to our question should be, emphatically, NONE. Where is a woman who in her single person, or with only one assistant, is expected to be cook, laundress, housemaid, dairymaid, nurse, seamstress, and a few other occupations thrown in, to get time for out-door labor? If, by a miraculous combination of strength and administrative ability, she could find any time, ought she to employ it? Most decidedly not. A farmer's wife is not merely a combined machine for the performance of the multifarious duties already mentioned—she is a woman. She is not only a housekeeper, but a home-maker, who, apart from the needs of her own higher nature, is constantly called upon for sympathy, for counsel, for the solution of problems in education and family government, for practical wisdom in every department of family life. Do these things come to her by instinct, and has she an inexhaustible reservoir for their supply? If any man thinks so, let him try to fill his wife's place for a week. What time or strength has a woman left to be "mother," who is an embodiment of perpetual motion for about fifteen hours a day, and not a few farmers' wives would say that their "hours" were over rather than under that number.

In regard only to the physical labor required in a farm house, many men have the most erroneous ideas. We all know the result when "John Grumlie" undertook to demonstrate what an easy life his wife had. And a large number of women would echo Mrs. John's answer to her distracted husband when he wished to return to his own domains,—quoth she: "I'm well content, you may keep it the rest of your life." It is a common remark among women who have done both out and in-door labor, that the former is much less exhausting than the latter. I knew a large family of daughters who were accustomed to do a great deal of out-door work. It was quite common for them to quarrel (not unamiably) over who should remain in the house. They found the out-door work so much easier; all wanted to go out. There were no nervous glances at the clock as it was nearing the dinner hour; no mental calculations of how it was possible to get all that must be done into the time there was to do it. They had only to

work with reasonable diligence for a certain number of hours, and their work was done. But what woman in a farm house, and with the average amount of help, can ever say that her work is done? It is new every morning,—and yet most exasperatingly old. It goes on with the ceaseless regularity of a tread-mill, often with about the same effect on the worker.

"Seam and gusset and band,
Band and gusset and seam,
Till over the buttons I fall asleep,
And sew them on in a dream."

Will not some present-day Hood give us a song of the farm-house? It might run in this style:

Breakfast and dinner and tea,
Milk and butter and cream,
Dishes and clothes and floors to scrub,
And leisure a long-lost dream.

Even the lines already quoted have been literally true in not a few cases. Does not the nearest approach to rest while awake which many a farmer's wife knows, come to her when sewing, and is not her recreation too often found in her mending basket? How long will she bear the strain of life under such conditions as these? "I might have done a little more," said a young wife to a friend, "but I remembered I was the baby's mother, and I went to bed."

If that sensible example was followed, instead of going to bed only when it is impossible to do even a little more, and the whole of life regulated on that principle, we would find fewer farmers' wives in our lunatic asylums, or filling premature graves.

I have already referred to milking as debatable work. Many consider it not at all debatable, and would answer positively in the affirmative as to woman's duty to perform it. It is certainly out-of-door quite as much as feeding the cattle. Where can one pair of hands in a house find time to do it? Their owner should be otherwise engaged at the proper hour for that. But there is one person who should most resolutely refuse to milk—the mother of young children. How many accidents have occurred to such children, resulting in death or life-long deformity, through their being left alone while their mother was engaged elsewhere, in some so-called duty. What duty can supersede that she owes to her children? None. When the farmer has more work than he can himself perform, he does one of two things. He secures sufficient help, or he cuts down the work. Let his wife do as he does; insist upon her right to do it, if necessary, and not try the false and wicked economy of saving everything but her own strength.

In the cases we have had in view it has been pre-supposed that the necessity exists for the closest economy. No considerations of mere money-making or saving, without that necessity, can justify a woman in using her spare time for work properly belonging to men. If she can possibly get such time, let her use it rather in making her dwelling place home like, and herself a more intelligent and agreeable companion for those dependent upon her. Let her children look back to their home when they may be far away from it, as the brightest and most attractive, as well as the happiest place they have ever known, and she will raise an all but impassable barrier between them and evil. It is not too much to say that in the bare

and in every way cheerless and uncomfortable condition of many farm houses, and the uncultured ways of their inmates, may be found the reason many a bright boy has left the farm for a life which seemed to promise more of happiness in the city, and who has found to his cost that the promise was only in seeming.

It may be thought by some that the picture given of woman's life on a farm is too highly colored. Those who know farm life well will say it is drawn only too faithfully. It is not for a moment asserted that that picture is a truthful one of farmers' homes as a whole. There are many of these, and I am glad to believe that their number is fast increasing, that will compare favorably in every important respect with any home in the land. But in these homes the wives and daughters are expected to do very little out-door labor.

Wet lands should be drained because we cannot unlock the fertility of the soil unless air takes the place of the water, says Prof. Scott, in the Agr. Gazette. The primary objects of land drainage are—to carry off stagnant water; to give a ready escape to the excess of what falls in rain; and to arrest the ascent of water from below, whether by springs or by capillary action; so as to render the land sufficiently dry for cultivation or grazing purposes, and at the same time regulate the supply of moisture to the growing plants. We drain to let water into the soil, as much as to take it out—not merely to carry off the surplus water, but to make the fertilizing rain filter through the soil. Amongst other effects, draining improves the texture of soil by making it more porous, drier, looser, and more friable; it makes land more easily worked; it raises the temperature of the soil; it enables a greater variety of crops to be grown; it gives an earlier seed-time and an earlier harvest; and it makes manure more effectual. And even this does not exhaust the practical advantages of draining wet lands.

An American writer, whose long connection with agricultural matters gives him a broad and correct view of them, remarks that "the influence of the best agricultural journals on improved practice, thoughts, and opinions, is far superior to all that which emanates from national departments and State boards, to say nothing of the raffish of the so-called agricultural experiment station. Further, that nothing else so surely marks success and usefulness as the correspondence in the columns of these papers, which is at once a proof of the value, credit, and influence of any journal."

The cows kept at the Munster Model Farm and Dairy School, Cork, are a useful, milky looking herd, of no special breed, but most of them showing a good deal of the Shorthorn, and some of them an unmistakable cross of the Ayrshire. Each cow's milk is weighed at every meal, and a register kept; this shows that in the year 1884 36 cows averaged 690 gallons of 10 lbs. to the gallon; in 1885, 29 cows averaged 725 gallons. The milk of cows sold during the year and replaced by others is not included. In 1884 one cow gave 1,050 gallons. In 1885 the top figure was 1,037; in the same year six cows gave over 800 gallons each, four gave over 900.

In England an authenticated case of butter having kept sweet and fresh for nearly eight years is reported.