

The Farm Home

Information Wanted.

By way of opening up a discussion that we think will be very helpful to all concerned, we would like to have as many short articles as possible from the readers of these pages dealing with the following topics. Contributors can write on any one or all of the subjects as they see fit:

- (1) How can the long winter evenings in the farm home be most profitably spent?
- (2) What are your ideas as to entertainment for young people in the country?
- (3) What would be the best plan for arranging a reading circle in the farm home, so that every member of it who could read could take part?

How Can the Long Winter Evenings in the Farm Home be Most Profitably Spent?

To the Editor of FARMING:

This question merits our closest attention, especially at this time of year, when days are short and nights are long. It is of peculiar interest, it seems to me, to the young in this age of so much competition in all the circles of life. The farmer, as well as any other being, should have a liberal education. The world demands youth abreast of the times—lofty in thought, pure in mind, active in duty, as well as strong in body. Youth whose highest ideal is not to amass the glittering stuff we call gold, but one, whose noblest aspirations is to become a strong pillar of truth, and virtue, and honesty; one who has a wide-awake appreciation of a highly mental, moral and physical character, the foundation of a permanent great nation, and the true basis of national happiness; not one whose highest ambition is the acquisition of the "gold that gilds the straitened forehead of the fool."

The poet is wise who sings:

"The riches of a commonwealth
Are free strong hands and hearts of health,
And more to her than gold and grain
Are the cunning hand, the cultured brain."

Of course, the occupation of farming gives ample physical development at any time of the year, but the busy seasons of spring, summer, and part of fall, forbid those engaged in this pursuit from spending much time at other employments. After a toilsome day's work, the best friend is "innocent sleep." However, when the long nights of winter visit us, there is given ample opportunity for the development of youthful talents to those who fain would grasp it.

The question of how to spend profitably the precious moments of spare time, is a broad one. The girls and young ladies perhaps would prefer to be engaged in fancy work, or to spend their leisure moments in working

artistic designs, or in the mastering of the musical art. Fancy work, the work of art, and musical culture, all are laudable and profitable employments. By all means, give these pursuits their proper worth, because they are potent agencies for the development of the finer tastes of their character. Beyond this fact there lies the truth that they afford pleasure and entertainment, which is a fine sauce to the daily routine of duty. The longings of the young men and boys somewhat differ from these. You may find them spending their evenings with the checker board and gaining knowledge of some kind; a few perchance about the fire gossip, ridiculing some poor innocent, or manufacturing some kind of fabrications to circulate abroad. A few, then, you will find poring over the weekly journals and papers, and some whom the demands of society prevent from spending many evenings at home. However the evening is spent, in any of these different ways, they have their influence and leave their indelible impress upon their character, shaping their destiny for weal or for woe.

All must admit youth to be the most crucial period in life. It is the forks of the road. It is the pivot on which our fate turns. What a man is at twenty you will likely find him at forty. He moulds his own character and shapes his own end. He is the artificer of his own mind, and life, and character and manhood. He sways over his passions, his lusts and will, or is swayed by them. How necessary then to build on virtue, for "virtue alone outbuilds the Pyramids; her monuments shall last when Egypt's fall." The poet gives a wise imperative when he says:

"Build strong the firm foundations of
Thy character; build on the eternal
Rock! all else is movable as desert
Sands. Build high! Beyond the clouds
the sun: beyond
The sun, thy temple's dome shall rise."

One means of profitable expenditure of our evenings is by systematic home reading. Home reading furnishes the only means of extending education beyond the school and of making self-culture a habit in life. It is only by the reading of books (and good biography and history especially) and the study of the wisdom of mankind, that the child or youth may acquire knowledge of real life and be made a participator in the results of the experience of our race. "The study of literature," Cicero says, "nourishes youth, entertains old age, adorns prosperity, solaces adversity, is delightful at home and unobtrusive abroad, deserts us not by day or night in journeying nor in retirement." We can form but a slight conception of the influence of books. Very few of us have

the privilege of personal contact with great writers, but all of us, through books, have the exalted privilege of their inspiration by reading their works. When we think of the effect of Mrs. Stowe's "Uncle Tom's Cabin" on the slave holding in the United States, of the revolution among schools and schoolmasters in England resulting from the circulation of Dickens' "Nicholas Nickleby," or of the adventurous spirit which prompted young men to resort to the remote borders of civilization, taught by reading Defoe's "Robinson Crusoe," we are truly convinced of the potent influence of a great book.

But the great obstacle which lies in the way of rural communities obtaining suitable reading, is a scarcity of suitable books, or perhaps an unfavorable situation to a public library. Those favorably situated to a library can easily avail themselves of the opportunity of obtaining readable literature. The lenient rules of most libraries allow one to take out enough books to last a week. But where this state of affairs does not exist, the question arises, "Where shall we get books to read?" Some one might suggest a way out of the difficulty by buying books for your own household. Notwithstanding that our literature is on the whole, cheap, yet no one household feels that it has the means of purchasing a library for itself. If you would allow me to make a suggestion in this line, I would say a solution of the problem would be found in the establishment of public school libraries. Public schools are convenient to all, and access may be had to them, at least five days in the week. Let the section, "en masse" shoulder the expense of equipping a library and, if many sections would take advantage of the scheme, exchange libraries for a time. Good, wholesome books in the hands of the youth would greatly increase the efficiency of our education. They would nourish for themselves a taste for good literature, and this would be a strong fortification against the effects of bad literature. This I think, would be a laudable scheme, and would merit the honorable appreciation of all wise rate-payers. This, would furnish a reading circle for every farm home in the section at a minimum cost.

D. H. MARSHALL.
Snelgrove, Ont., Oct. 10th, 1899.

We are in the midst of important changes in political issues and parties, and social and industrial conditions, and it is felt that a frank and friendly interchange of opinion on the part of thoughtful and serious men may lead to united and efficient action and important directions.—*Selected.*