

colonists moved inland and away from the levels of the shore, the country became rougher, the soils more obdurate and the task of subduing them more difficult. The later migration from New England to the richer lands of the west was thus, in a sense, inverted among the first two or three generations from the settlers. But the very harshness of the picturesque but rugged lands of lower New England east of the Hudson held the settlers longer in the clearing and, when cleared, impressed their immediate descendants with loftier notions of the value of the meadow, of the arable land and of the pasture of the established farm. Thus, not only the agricultural traditions and habitudes derived from England in the seventeenth century, but special conditions of soil combined to give New England a population to whom agriculture was not only a vocation but a kind of industrial creed. It dominated the New Englander's life of toil and trade very much as the orthodox Puritan religion dominated his soul.

Out of this agricultural epoch of New England lasting for some two centuries came perhaps the grandest stock of men, measured by their fundamental and deeper traits, that ever sprung upon the earth. But we concern ourselves not now with any analysis or praise of the Puritan or sub-Puritan character, but merely with those institutions and habits of the time which made content on the farm, where now are restlessness and discontent.

The first, most forceful and most conspicuous social fact in a community where almost everybody was a farmer was the levelling of the class distinction. The soil tiller who owned his land might have to toil for a living like a serf, but he never incurred the serf's degradation. Around him and on the same level the great mass of

the community were his fellow farmers, whom he never gazed upon from below, either as a matter of social rank or from the plane of inferior vocation. Slightly beneath him were the class of farm laborers—not many, when wooded lands were cheap, nor profoundly lowered as a class, in days when farmers themselves interchanged services and toiled even harder than their own field hands. The country merchant was, unless exceptionally rich, the farmer's peer, no better and no worse, in the social scale. Above the farmer stood only the men of the professions, usually college graduates, including the minister, and the squirearchs. But these, while they formed a certain distinctive "cult," were too few to be a very strongly emphasized group or impress the class distinction harshly. Of the two most prominent, the minister, vested with powers well nigh pontifical, yet held them not of men; and the old country squire, under the microscope of time and New England novels, have obtained in our day a greatly magnified importance which they never really possessed. If the farmer had to wrestle hard with his niggard soils and had slight education and few creature comforts, he had, as offsets, simple wants, social equality and an assertive manhood. He was in a large sense the *civis Romanus* of his time and place.

Following closely on equality as a benign influence, making for many social as well as civic virtues, was what may be called the localization of interests. The farmers were far shut in from the outer world in days when the telegraph, daily paper and railroad were things unknown, and a journey by the lumbering stage-coach, the event of a lifetime. Outside of the farm itself almost every energy had to focus within the narrow limits of the township and its village. Every small incident was magnified in im-