

Why We Left the Farm

From The Saturday Evening Post

Continued from Last Week

All this time I hired help in the house whenever I could get anybody, which was not often. Nor did they stay with me long when I did get them. "The work is too hard" was their invariable excuse. In vain I pointed out to them that they did not do nearly so much as I was compelled to do when I had no help, for I was never idle even when they were with me. One of them remarked wittingly that that was no skin off of her nose. She didn't propose to work herself to death for a lot of hired hands, even if I did!

The Tragedy of a Kitchen Sink

Louis was not the least bit stingy about paying houseservants. He always wanted me to have them if they could be gotten without losing time from the farm work. Since the first summer of our marriage he had never done any of the laborious work. Superintending the farm took all his time. All manual labor was delegated to the men employed for that purpose. This was right and proper. The point is, conditions on the farm were such that he could get workers and I couldn't.

I had gradually gotten into the ways of other country people; and a glance at conditions on the farm will show that these ways are almost a necessity. Fruit and vegetables have to be raised in abundance to supply the farm table if these things are ever to appear there fresh, and it would be wanton mismanagement to throw away the surplus and buy inferior canned stuff for winter. You have to kill your own hogs to have hams, bacon and lard of the best quality. After the nightmare of hog-killing time is safely over, the unused fat must be made into soap or utterly wasted. Turkeys, chickens and eggs must be supplied for the table. It is very little more trouble to provide enough to make a big showing in paying the grocery bill. Milk and butter are used abundantly for the home. Skimmed milk is absolutely essential to the well-being of the young pigs. Who would think of feeding the cream to them, also, instead of making it into golden butter for the market basket? In fact, the greater part of my neighbor women paid all grocery bills with these things; and some of them even had enough left to buy some longed-for piece of furniture occasionally. It was about this time that I began to feel the strain of farm life in my spirit. Heretofore, though I usually went to bed so tired that every bone and muscle in me ached, my discomfort was almost wholly physical. I adored my husband and my baby. We had good health and no worries for our financial future. My husband's ambition was so great that he had swept me along with him in his plans and I, uncomplainingly accepted my part in them. I can truthfully say I never shirked either what he expected of me, or what I expected of myself. In this way I carried a bigger burden than I should if I had abandoned myself to

either his ideas or my own. He would have been comparatively satisfied with a disordered home, a slovenly looking wife and a dirty baby, so long as the hands were well fed at the proper time. I must do menial service for his laborers because he expected it of me; but I must keep myself, my child and my house neat and clean because I expected that of myself. I dared not relax my efforts here. I had long ago dropped every diversion I had ever had. Now, when he, already owning more than five hundred acres of land, promptly bought eighty more without providing me even a kitchen sink, my spirit broke a little. The one article I needed so badly and it would have cost so little comparatively. I went about my work without any of the high courage I had felt before. At such times, as I looked at myself in the mirror, a kind of shock passed through me at the change I was beginning to see there; and I turned away half ashamed.

The next summer I not only had the regular hands to feed and their rooms to care for—the room above the toolhouse was now occupied by unused machinery—but extra hayhands and threshers, sometimes as many as thirty at a time.

My brother and sister came to visit me that summer and their attitude toward me and my situation added to the humiliation I was already beginning to feel. After they had been with me a few days they began to treat me as we unconsciously treat a well-beloved member of the family suddenly stricken with an incurable malady. Their pitying glances followed me, though they instantly looked away when I caught them eyeing me. It was one thing to joke about my marrying a farmer before hand—

quite another to see me carrying out some of their wildest predictions.

When Ethel came into the hot kitchen one afternoon and discovered me over a steaming washtub of towels, the perspiration pouring from my face, she shut her teeth with a click and almost hissed:

"You have already done enough work today to exhaust a stevedore. And your husband is a——"

I felt the blood leaving my face as I turned and faced her, trembling.

She gave me no chance to reply however; nor did she finish what she started to say. She literally rushed out of the room, her face flaming. No doubt the contrast between her dainty white frills and laces and my sober working garb only made her distress greater.

To me, all that the scene implied seemed suddenly intolerable. Scalding tears of self-pity would mingle with the perspiration for a little while.

I had been wild with delight when they wrote me they were coming. Truth compels me to state that, dearly as I loved them, I was glad when they went home.

Family Interference

Promptly after their return home mother wrote me a long letter begging me to come to visit her. She sent an invitation to Louis, too, of course, but said she knew he was very busy; and, if he couldn't come, she suggested that he stay with his mother a while and give his mother-in-law the great pleasure of seeing her only grandchild. Much more that was kind and sweet the letter contained; and I knew, as well as if I had been present, the conversation that had taken place among my family after Ethel and John had returned.

I handed the letter to Louis to read. His only comment, after completing its perusal, was:

"Much they know about farming—to ask us to visit them now!"

I promptly wrote an affectionate, cheerful reply, saying that we were much too busy now to visit her; "but, perhaps, later——"

I am really at a loss to account for the peculiar state I now fell into. I grew nervous and self-conscious; when my old friends came to see me, which they still occasionally did in spite of the fact that I never returned their visits, I felt strangely ill at ease with them. I felt as if I was in a different world from other people—a world where nothing counted but rushing work. I grew alarmed and began to struggle against this feeling. As struggling seemed only to make the matter worse, I thought:

"I must get away from home more. I must try to get an afternoon occasionally to go out to see somebody and take up neighborhood interests again."

But how? My horse was always used in the fields; and there is a strange prejudice among country people that would place a woman walking to see a neighbor in nearly the same class with a tramp. At least it was so where I lived. And, even if I had cared to brave public opinion in this way, baby had now grown so big I could not have carried her so far as our nearest neighbor's home.

No; there was no help for it. I could not get away just now. Later, perhaps—

That hope a farmer's wife has of things being better later on is often the only thing that keeps her out of the grave or the madhouse.

One Sunday afternoon, as Louis and I sat on the porch, Kitty, a magnificent mare never used for farm work, put her head over the gate and whinnied friendlily. An idea occurred to me. "Why don't you let the men work Kitty sometimes and let me have Bird?" Bird was my horse. Louis replied carelessly: "Kitty is too valuable and raises too fine colts for me to risk hurting her with hard work." A lump rose in my throat and a kind of despair seized me. I answered as lightly as I could, though my voice was not very steady: "Then it is only the human female who runs no risk of hurting herself and her offspring by hard work?" The thrust went home and Louis flushed angrily; but his reply was quietly spoken: "If you did not want to work you should not have married a farmer." And he rose and walked off. We had never quarreled. Quarreling and crying are two things in which I very rarely indulge. I am by no means meek and lowly inside, but it takes a very positive abuse to make me create a scene. Probably John was right when he said: "Eleanor is like dynamite. She seems perfectly harmless until you hit her just right; but when she goes off something is going to move!" The new eighty acres being three miles from home made it necessary that the men should take their

Continued on Page 18



King George, accompanied by Lord Rosebery, inspecting exhibits at the Cattle Show held at the Royal Agricultural Hall, Islington