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# The Farmer's Advocate

## and Home Magazine.

"PERSEVERE AND SUCCEED."

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### EDITORIAL.

#### Farmers' Wives and Insanity.

The idea has long been current that, compared with other classes of people, by far the larger percentage of married women confined in the insane asylums are farmers' wives. From time to time newspapers and other periodicals repeat the story. It reappeared lately in one of our U. S. contemporaries, whereupon Dr. Geo. G. Groff, of the Pennsylvania Board of Health, pointed out explicitly that it was not true, as abundantly proved by statistics. Dr. E. C. Runge, superintendent of the St. Louis Insane Asylum, a competent authority, writes: "It has always been my firm conviction that the outcry against farming life in relation to psychic disease was not based upon facts, but was the offspring of deep-rooted superstition."

Dr. Groff is convinced that less farmers' wives become insane than of any other class, owing to the joyous elements of country life.

In this connection, we noticed recently the assertion by English physicians that life in London flats—that is, furnished apartment houses—is driving women insane by its monotony. The theory is that the economies of the flat have taken from women a large part of the work that used to occupy their attention, while the restrictions with regard to children have reduced to a minimum the duties of motherhood. If a woman does not take up with books, art, business or church work, she is seized with ennui, or morbid, brooding introspection, and may, as many have done, become a mental wreck.

The subject of this article may be unusual, but the "Farmer's Advocate and Home Magazine" regards it as most important, touching as it does the life of our people at a very crucial point. We, therefore, some time ago instituted an enquiry respecting farmers' wives and insanity, seeking our information direct from the medical superintendents of about a dozen representative Canadian insane asylums.

In consequence of the difficulty in tracing the records and origin of cases, and because of the transfers from one asylum to another, it is scarcely possible to tabulate data that would warrant specific conclusions upon the question, but so far as figures were available, they did not show a proportionate preponderance of farmers' wives in Canadian asylums, compared with other classes. Even if they are more in actual numbers, it would not be surprising, because agriculture is the predominant industry of the country, and far more people are engaged in that occupation.

Consequently, the agricultural classes would figure more largely in the records. We can safely conclude that the charge is not true, and have no doubt, if the facts were fully known, that the percentage of farmers' wives insane, compared with other classes, would be found very much less.

The letters we have received from some of the medical superintendents contain statements of such important significance, that we feel that they should not be withheld from our readers. They bear testimony to the wholesomeness of farm as compared with city life, and to the satisfactory condition and mental status of the wives of Canadian farmers. An expert in mental disorders told the writer some years ago that very many cases of insanity were due to want of nutrition, induced by various causes, thus depleting the

physical basis of the mind—the brain. Bear that statement in mind in considering the following quotations:

Note the observations, first, of Dr. C. K. Clark, of the Aylum at Kingston: I have no reason to believe that farmers' wives in Ontario are more prone to mental disease than other classes, unless subjected to conditions that no longer pertain to the average farmer's home. Of recent years things have improved so much in the way of sanitation, better diet and social conditions generally, that the health of the farmer's wife is better, on the average, than it was, say twenty years ago. I am not so pessimistic as many of the writers in our daily newspapers, and it is my belief that acute insanity is rarer than formerly. The admissions to institutions are greater, but this is because of the greater public appreciation of their usefulness. Perhaps, if we are not more careful than at present in regard to the exclusion of degenerates among the classes being imported, we shall have a larger admission rate in the future. . . . I have a great deal of faith in the level-headedness of the farmer's wife, and cannot understand why she should develop insanity more readily than the city woman surrounded by more artificial conditions. It is merely a question of a life which is most likely to maintain perfect physical health, and in these days when good foods are easily accessible, drudgery lessened owing to labor-saving devices, the farmer's wife has benefited as well as others."

Dr. Daniel Clark, of the Toronto Asylum, tells us, and we ask our readers to ponder well what he says: "It is my opinion that farmers' wives, as a rule, are a healthy class with healthy work in the fresh air, and who are, as a whole, contented. It is altogether different in the large cities and towns in the surrounding modes of life and strenuous struggles to procure decent livings. . . . The social condition of farmers' wives has improved during the last quarter of a century, while the poverty-stricken classes are increasing with the cities and towns. This means more insanity among the latter. Hunger, bad ventilation, crime, foulness, poor clothing, drunkenness, defective food, etc.—all are factors in the production of mental disorders."

We conclude with a few striking observations from the letter of Dr. J. Russell, medical superintendent of the Hamilton, Ont., asylum, who utters a warning to the public, which, we fear, is only too well grounded, and which should be taken well to heart, but it should be borne in mind that his warning is equally applicable to all other classes in the community as to farmers. It may not be pleasant reading, but we realize that the "Farmer's Advocate" has a duty to perform to its constituency which we cannot afford to shirk. "Heredity is a far more potent influence in predisposing to insanity than occupation. If farmers, for instance, would take as much interest in rearing healthy human stock as they do in breeding animal stock, there would be less insanity in the country. As a matter of fact, the same law governs both, i. e., like begets like. It is not uncommon for a married woman to be admitted to the asylum, suffering, say, from puerperal insanity, recover and be discharged, bear another child, and be again admitted to the asylum. What is to be expected of such progeny? We hear a great deal about the White Plague, and the laudable efforts put forth to stay its ravages, but there is another plague which is perpetuating and reproducing itself before our eyes, and which is even more blighting and far-reaching than tubercle, and yet no voice is raised to warn the people against its ravages."

#### The Shortage of Good Horses.

It is unfortunate that at a time when good horses are in such great demand at high prices there are so few of that class in the hands of the farmers of this country for sale. During the depression some ten years ago the prices for horses, as for many other farm products, ruled so low that many farmers gave up breeding colts and sold their best mares because the best brought the highest prices—as, of course, they always do—and the result has been that when good times came, and prices for horses went up with a bound, there were few of the desirable class for sale, and few first-class mares left in the country to breed from. The experience of farmers in this regard illustrates the folly of abandoning a branch of the business when a temporary depression prevails, instead of exercising at such times more care to produce the very best, which will always sell at a good price, no matter what the state of the market for average stuff may be. The few who kept their best mares and bred them to first-class stallions have reaped a rich harvest in the sale of the produce since the turn of the tide. To one who remembers how common it was twenty years ago to see good teams of heavy horses driven by farmers coming into town, it is discouraging to observe the scarcity of such now, and to notice the inferior character of the great majority of farmers' horses at the present time—nondescript, not fit for any special purposes, few of them even a desirable general-purpose class, and few that command a price that pays for their rearing when they are offered for sale, even in these times when anything in the shape of a horse will sell for all it is worth. Enterprising importers and breeders have in the last few years done much to improve the situation by placing good stallions at the service of the farmers, but too many are yet patronizing grade and inferior horses, for the reason that the service fee is lower than a first-class sire. This is a great mistake, as the probability is that the extra charge will be many times repaid in the value of the colt, if offered for sale at any age, and that he will sell for one-half as much more at maturity as one bred from an inferior sire. But there is a lamentable shortage of good mares in the country from which to breed the best selling class. How rare it is to see a mare that can reasonably be expected to produce first-class selling stock. There is room in this country for thousands more of pure-bred heavy draft mares, and no farm stock is likely to prove more profitable in the years to come.

The rush of immigration, the opening up of new districts to cultivation, both in the East and West—the settlers all needing horses—the building of new railroads, and the rapid growth of our towns and cities, will all combine to create a demand for more horses, to say nothing of the export trade, which constantly calls for the best, and pays well for them, too. The probability practically amounts to a certainty that for the next twenty years there will be an active demand for all that will be raised of good farm horses and those suitable for heavy city teaming, as well as a brisk demand for high-class carriage and saddle horses. Those who have mares suitable for breeding either class, may safely put them to breeding, if due care be exercised to mate them with good judgment, for the production of the most salable sort. Those who have not such mares, and we fear they are the majority, may do well to purchase such, and there can scarcely be any doubt about the wisdom of the investment, as a brood mare, if carefully handled,