

The best method of planting an apple orchard is to obtain the qualities suitable to the soil. This information must be gained from some practical gardener in the neighbourhood; and this opinion ought to be checked by an outside expert, who combines practical experience with scientific knowledge.

Above all things, the great essential is good flavour and the power of keeping. A great big apple that looks very beautiful, but is of a texture that will not keep, or whose skin rapidly wrinkles, is, for market purposes, valueless.

Mr. Wells' method is to plant suitable young trees six feet apart, and to plant between them strawberries and black-currant bushes; then, as the apple trees grow older and take up all the spare room between each tree, he gradually removes the strawberries and currant bushes, and he finds that the crop of the united orchard, almost from the beginning, pays all his expenses and rendered a profit. One year he sold from twelve acres of ground £400 worth of strawberries.

The great complaint of buyers against the English apples is not only because of their inferior quality, but of the careless manner in which they are packed. And this utter want of care and neatness in packing is the great fault of English fruit sent to market.

"Look here, sir," one day said a large greengrocer to me; "can you be surprised that we cannot buy English fruit when they come to us like that?" And he pointed with a finger of scorn at some baskets of English plums. "And can you be surprised we buy foreign fruit in preference when they come in packed like that?" And I was not surprised. "But," he went on to say, "here is an exception. The plums of this English grower are carefully selected and packed; and so sure are we of his fruit, that his brand on the box is sufficient. We do not ask to look inside, and, as a consequence, his plums always fetch a very good price, probably higher than any other plums in the market."

And so it is with apples. If they are to be profitably grown, they must be carefully packed without the slightest bruise, and picked just in the very nick of time, and carefully stowed away in properly-constructed houses; and when sent to the market, only the very best must be selected, and these must be packed in small and convenient packages. I would also suggest that a taking registered brand be placed on each package.

I do not for one moment say that a lady-tenant without any income whatever could make a living out of fruit-growing—she might if she had sufficient capital to make a start and had a good knowledge of the business, but even then I think it doubtful—but what I do say is, that a lady-tenant or, better still, two lady-tenants, taking between them a small village house, could by fruit-growing on the best and most scientific lines add to their income and, at the same time, be engaged in a most healthful and interesting occupation.

Mr. C. Lee Campbell of Glewstone Court, Ross, planted an orchard of apple trees of between eight and nine acres at distances of six, eight and nine feet apart in November 1883. In 1896 he sold eighty-five tons of apples at prices from 8s. to 28s. per cwt. Say the eight-five tons sold at the low average

of 9s. per cwt., this amounts to £765, which is equal to £90 per acre for the whole orchard.

The present system of land tenure in England is against the apple-grower, because, as I said before, it takes some twenty years before an apple orchard reaches its highest development. Unless a tenant can be made secure in a holding, or reap the benefit of the labour and capital expended, no one would undertake the expense and trouble of planting an apple orchard. No tenant would plant an orchard for the sake of a landlord; but I think an equitable arrangement between landlord and tenant might, even in the present state of the law, be reached.

The same difficulty, however, does not arise in rearing poultry, and it does seem a crying shame that we import such a prodigious quantity of poultry and eggs that could so easily be produced in this country. With poultry-rearing, as with all other agricultural produce, it is the best quality only that pays. Badly bred strains that run to skin and bone and carry very little flesh, costs as much to keep as the well-bred plump stock, and fetches a deal less money.

I rarely see in my part of the country a well-bred, carefully-selected strain of cocks and hens. In Surrey and Sussex they do these things better, although the way they artificially cram their poultry is not pleasant to contemplate. I would sooner give 4s. or 4s. 6d. for one large Surrey fowl than pay 5s. for a pair of the ordinary skinny things that mostly hang in poulterers' shops.

The Heathfield district of Sussex is well wooded and hilly, with deep valleys between the hills, and the land is naturally light and sandy. Most of the cottagers in this district keep a few fowls, and the dead poultry despatched from Heathfield to-day represents an annual value of £140,000.

A case is given of a labourer having a wage of 15s. per week, out of which he paid 2s. per week for his cottage and garden. His landlord lent him twenty-four hens, two cocks, and a movable house, and allowed him the free run of his fields. At the end of the year he made a profit of £20, returned the twenty-four hens, and had six pullets left to go on with.

There is no doubt that small glass houses, filled when required with warm moist air, devoted to the rearing of tomatoes and mushrooms, and arranged and worked so as to produce quantity without sacrificing quality, with every inch of room utilised and one crop succeeding another crop without intermission, pays very handsomely.

I have before me authentic figures showing the proceeds of one glass house. It is one hundred feet long and proportionately broad; it is filled with warm moist air; during the summer it is devoted to raising cucumbers and mushrooms.

The cucumber plants are set alongside, and at equal distances from each other in richly manured beds, and, when they begin to fruit, other plants are set between them, so that they may begin to yield when the older plants are ceasing to bear. Mushroom spawn is sown in the beds. Down the middle of the house runs a long narrow table, on which are reared ferns, foliage plants, orchids and other exotics.

The cucumber plants have yielded about three hundred dozen of high quality cucumbers that fetched in the Newcastle market 3s. to 3s. 6d. per dozen. Cucumbers could be grown all the year round; but in October the house is filled with flowers, especially chrysanthemums and tulips that will be ready at Christmas, and then the finest quality blooms will sometimes fetch 6s. per dozen.

The plants are reared in pots in the open air till they are removed in October to the forcing house. The house is reckoned to produce one thousand plants. If each plant should yield 3s. worth of blooms, it would amount to £150.

The rearing of rabbits, if conducted on the best principle, can be made to pay.

To sum up, a lady-tenant, on a small income, can live in a cheaper and more refined manner in the country than if herded in London and the large towns. In the country villages she can be of some use, of some importance, and, if she be to the manner born, a veritable messenger of light, culture, and refinement; and also, if she be fitted and has inclinations that way, she may add to her small income by taking up one or other of the industries I have lightly touched upon.

At times, by exchanging residences with a London friend, if she has the mind, she may add vigour to her brain and breadth to her soul by taking her part in the great surging on-pouring movement of the great capital. Her life then will be filled and rounded with high interests, and the deadly weight of having no definite, interesting useful work will be removed from her shoulders, her heart then will grow full of joy and her step become brighter and quicker, and all things, from the smallest weed growing by the roadside, will become filled with wonder, meaning, and hope.

CONCLUSION.

Since writing these articles I have read an article in the last Christmas Number of the *Land Magazine*, entitled "Women and The Future of Agriculture," by the Countess of Warwick.

In this article the Countess proposes the establishment of an Agricultural College for women, and in connection therewith the establishment, in suitable parts of the country, of Women Agricultural Settlements.

I can only say that I wish all success to her proposals. To make my scheme a success, what is required are women who have a practical knowledge of the industries I have touched upon in these articles, and a college or colleges on the lines the Countess proposes will give the much needed and essential knowledge. And if, in addition, a body of influential ladies were to form a society to find suitable tenants for the landlord when he had erected his Village Homes, and would advance to competent applicants small sums of money as a start, with interest and repayments at easy rates, then I think that in a short time not only would the country feel the benefit of a more even distribution of her population with all that that implies, but the importation of much foreign produce would rapidly diminish, because it would be produced, and produced better, by ladies and others in village homes and small holdings.

