

THE FARMER'S ADVOCATE AND HOME MAGAZINE.

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IN THE DOMINION.

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How's That?

By Peter McArthur.

I have to thank F. M. Clement, B. S. A., for a kindness he had no thought of doing me. By a chance question he recast all my ideas of farm work. He flung two words at me over his shoulder, and instantly my ideas shifted, like the bits of colored glass in a kaleidoscope when you shake the tube. He had come over from Dutton to show me how to handle that orchard I have been talking about, and, to begin with, he pruned a tree. While at work, he explained just why he removed one branch and spared another, and told me just what I should have in mind when pruning a tree. Of this part of my experience I shall have nothing to say, for you can get such instructions as he gave in the bulletins or in "The Farmer's Advocate." From time to time I asked questions, and tried to figure out just how much hard work I would have to do to get results. I was also figuring how much of the work I could get out of doing without being caught. But he finally completed his task, so that every branch was swinging free and open to the sunlight. Then he climbed down and looked at his work. I was standing behind him. Suddenly he asked, with a backward turn of his head:

"How's that?"

There you have the question that startled me. Simple enough, isn't it? There doesn't seem to be much to it, but wait.

It has been my privilege to stand beside a great artist while he drew aside the curtain from his picture, and then to have him fling the same question at me:

"How's that?"

It has also been my privilege to have poets whom the world acclaim as great, recite their poems to me, and then ask:

"How's that?"

To have the same question flung at me in the orchard was something of a shock. The manner and the tone were the same. I realized that once more I had been asked to pass on something in which a man had expressed himself. The chance question suddenly elevated work to a form of self-expression worthy to rank with the great arts. Ever since I have been able to see possibilities in work—mere work. It is something that a man

can engage in as a man, and not simply as a drudge.

"How's that?"

* * *

Now the cat is out of the bag. I have let you see that I do not like work, and never have. But I am neither humiliated nor ashamed. Why should I like work? I have seen it in almost all its forms, and have practiced it in a few. Almost everywhere it is slavish and sordid. I have seen it in the sweat-shops of the big cities, in the factories of the New England States, the mills of the South, and of England, and on the Canadian farms. Always it was wearing, soul-stifling, degrading. Men, women and children—little children—were being ground to extinction by work. They became old before their time, broken-spirited, deformed. Work is a hideous monster, demanding all we can give of youth and strength and vitality, and giving in return only a starved and meagre living. Seeing work in this way, I learned to hate it. It has "the primal, eldest curse on it." It is slavery of the cruellest kind, and makes slaves of men even where they are their own masters. Do you wonder that I turned to the arts? The arts are joyous, exultant. They enable a man to express himself, and we all hunger for self-expression. The greatest tragedy in the world is to be misunderstood, and we are all misunderstood. The artist makes himself understood—at least, to a select few—but the worker usually dies

"With all his sweetness in him."

But here was a worker who expressed himself by an ordinary piece of farm work. He had laid creative hands on a tree, and it would take form as a picture might under the brush of an artist, or a song on the lips of a poet. He had put into it his conception of what it should be. In that way he gave expression to his own soul, and was willing that the world should look and see. He had enjoyed the task because he had a definite purpose and knew just what he was doing. He got the effect he was after, just as an artist might when working under the stimulus of an urgent inspiration. I looked with new-found admiration, and now the tree has a new meaning to me. I feel that he has revealed to me something of himself, just as did the artists and the poets.

How's that?

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Since getting this little flash of light, farm work has looked very good. Farming is a great art, and the artist works with life, rather than with pigments or words. He gets his effects by working in accord with Nature. Surely that is greater than merely imitating Nature, or describing it. And, though I look at farming in this way, I do not regard it any the less as a science or as a money-making proposition. In fact, it should be all the more scientific and profitable by making it artistic. The art puts the joy into it and elevates it above mere drudgery. Mark Twain said that "Play is work that man enjoys," and I see no reason why many kinds of farm work should not have the charm of play. If we could only go at it in that way, we would accomplish more, and life would be more worth living.

Of course, I quite realize that I am only a beginner at real farming, and that I should remember the test: "Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off." There is a job of ditching to do that it will be hard to make joyous, but never mind. I have at least seen that farm work can be made fine and ennobling, instead of being a sordid drudgery, and that is worth while, even though I may have to write a poem to express what I mean, instead of cultivating a field so that it will tell what I want to say as clearly as would the verses. I know that a true farmer who was master of the possibilities of the art he practices could do it, and for that reason I shall have a higher respect for farming. I may not be able to do it myself, but my failure will not prove that I am wrong. It will only prove that I cannot do the work as it should be done. Perhaps I have been bating work too long to take it in the right spirit, even after I have discovered its possibilities. But knowing what I do, I shall in future have nothing but pity for the man who can make of farm work nothing better than a dreary round of grinding work, and I am afraid I shall have little respect for the young man who starts at the present time if he develops into a slave. He has a chance that his father never had to make his life worth while. In the meantime, I am going at farm work with the feeling that it is a great art, in which a man can find enjoyment and self-expression, and if I find that I am wrong, I shall not be afraid to tell you so and to shoulder the blame. But if I find that there is both joy and profit in it, I shall certainly be a proper laugh at you who think that my failure is absurd. I have much to get even for, and I shall not fail to rub it in if I get a chance.

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Now that I have taken charge of the orchard, pleasant coincidences are happening. I do not

remember that any of my friends ever took up such work, but now that I have started, I am not going to be lonely. A friend in New York has written that he has bought an orchard of 5,000 trees in Virginia. In all the years that I knew him, he never once spoke of orchards, but some sudden impulse caught him, and he has gone into the business on a fairly large scale. It will be interesting to see how he gets along with it, for he has lived in Boston and New York all his life, and his orchard is being worked for him by a local manager. It is not likely that he can go to see it more than once a year, and then for only a week or so. Unless that local manager is a wonder, things will be likely to get into a tangle. Already he has been fined on the complaint of a neighbor because of the language he used while trying to cultivate the orchard with a balky mule. But that is only one co-incidence. On the day before Mr. Clement came to instruct me, I got a letter from an old friend from whom I had not heard for over twenty years. He is now in British Columbia managing an orchard of one hundred and twenty-five acres, and twelve acres of his own. Last year he planted ten thousand trees, and has fifteen men working under him. All this makes my sixty-two trees look trifling, but I have all that I care to deal with. But if I get any showing of apples, I am going to issue a challenge to those two fellows to produce something that can equal our Ontario apples. I shall offer to exchange boxes of apples with them, so as to get an idea of how ours compare with those of Virginia and British Columbia. I may not be dealing with trees in the thousands, but I will back our Ontario Spies against anything they can produce. On the whole, I am looking forward to having some fun with that orchard.

Have Gone Back to the Farm.

Editor "The Farmer's Advocate":

Wonderful, but true! In a certain city newspaper the other day there appeared the information, under the heading of "Local News," that a couple who had been living in that city for a year had, much to the regret of their many friends and acquaintances, "gone back to live on the farm." No further particulars were given. If the signs of the times are not very badly interpreted, it is more than likely, as the weeks and months roll by, that similar notices of this description will appear more and more frequently.

In view of the rush to the cities of people from the country, which has been such a marked characteristic of recent years, the latter statement may appear at first sight to be almost an absurd one. But is it? We do not know, of course, the reasons which led the couple referred to to go back to the farm, and it may be that circumstances forced them to do so against their inclinations. Yet, on the other hand, we have had opportunities of talking with people who have left their farms to go and live in cities, and it is surprising to find how many of them would gladly go back to their farms and their country life if it were possible for them to do so. Those who would do so have had experience of both city and country life; the "gilt has worn off the ginger-bread" of both; they can clearly see the advantages and disadvantages of both; the so-called gaieties of the city have been tasted, as well as the so-called peace and quiet of the country; and yet the decision of these excellent judges is that they would, if they could, go back to the farm.

So far as we have been able to judge, the first consideration in these people's minds which leads them to this decision is that of which we hear so much nowadays, and with very good reason—the high cost of living. To those who have been accustomed to no stint of butter, eggs, milk, poultry, vegetables, and other farm produce, with the great additional value of their all being good and all being fresh; the difference in having to pay for these, as the expression is, "through the nose," in money, and sometimes, it must be said, also in quality, is simply appalling. On the one hand, to mention a small matter, but one which is indicative of the rest, to be able to go out and pick as much fresh parsley as you want; and, on the other, to have to pay five cents for a very small and often faded bunch, brings home very quickly to those who have lived on farms the difference in the cost of living. And if we care to look at this matter from a different viewpoint, the fact that prices are so high for all farm produce, puts farming as a profession—for profession it is for those who wish to succeed in it—in quite a different position to that in which it was only a few short years ago. The people who have come to the city to live are, many of them, those who went through the stress, labor and drudgery of the times when prices were but half, and in many cases less than half, of those of to-day. It is little wonder that they would go back to the farm if they could, and that they are astonished at the young man of the cities being content to slave on, often at pitiful wages, and with long hours, when they could learn to become farmers.