

About the Farm

Farmers and Their Hired Help

Mrs. Fred R. Hall

This is not written with the intention of trying to convey the impression that all farmers are intentionally thoughtless or criminally careless in their treatment of farm help. However, a good many of them are careless and many are entirely devoid of any degree of justice where help is concerned.

In the first place they desire a "strictly temperate and steady hired man, married. References required." A man possessing the requirements applies for the position. If he happens to advance the idea that considering the fact that he is required to furnish references, it would be only fair to receive the same of the farmer, his remark is considered impertinent and his application dismissed as undesirable.

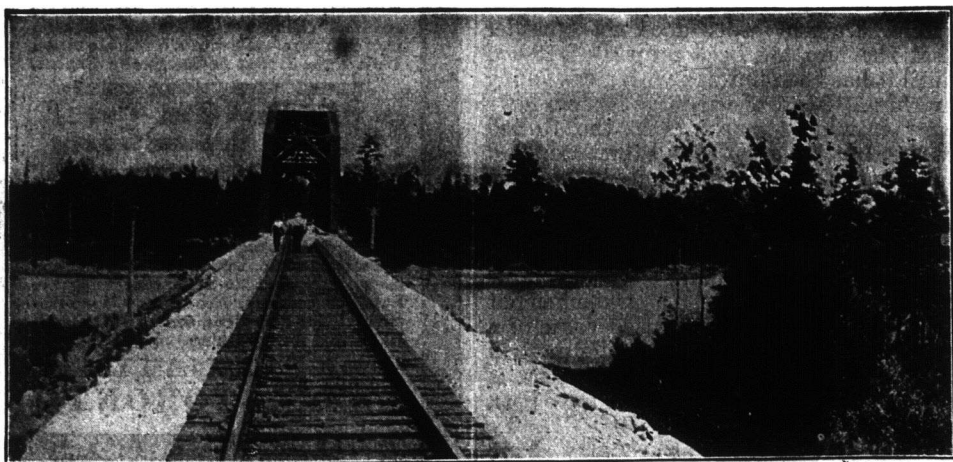
I will state briefly the conditions we found when answering one of these advertisements. The farmer gave no reference (they never do) but stated in a letter that he was a church elder. We hired at the usual wages and moved to him. When we got there we began to get his references, viz., two years before he had had four families in his house and the man who was moving out stated he had offered to move about every three to six weeks since he had been there.

The house was fair-sized having five rooms but out of repair—leaky roof, dirty and ragged wall paper and of the eight

where we lived. Others have pits dug and when they become full the buildings are moved. Very few are built so they can be cleaned often and kept anywhere near healthful. And the ideal method of running water is practically never found. I have before me directions for a cement "septic tank" so constructed that the claims made for it is that the sewage is purified until it is merely clear water. This would give the rural home all the toilet and bath conveniences enjoyed by their city friends with even more sanitary conditions. The estimated cost is about \$45.00, including sand and gravel, which nearly every farmer can get with very little expense.

The use of chloride of lime in these toilets would do much toward remedying the conditions, but is seldom used (in fact, I have found people who didn't know what it was or its use). Even a generous supply of wood ashes, of which most farmers have an abundance, would work wonders but are seldom used, they are often piled in an unsightly heap in the back yard.

In this locality, which is low and full of springs, the majority of the wells are open wells, i.e., not driven but are usually springs dug out about six to ten feet deep, with a wooden pump placed in them which has a cylinder strapped upon the side, in which the valve works by a wooden rod connected to the pump handle. Under the prevailing conditions all waste water drains directly into the well and the place through which the rod works is always open.



Winnipeg River Crossing

doors in the house only one had a whole latch and a lock and key. Some had a strap on, some a wooden button and some nothing at all. The cellar was simply a hole dug in the ground, which had caved in and had no light, ventilation or cellar stairs. We had no cistern but had a good driven well in the back yard and a well-sodded front yard.

The horses were the most disagreeable and vicious lot we ever had to handle. One was balky and a runaway, so when he wasn't doing one he was trying to do the other. Another was a kicker, biter and a runaway and a person handling him was in constant danger. The farmer forbade any kind of punishment being meted out to the horse, and after escaping injury several times my husband refused to drive him any more. Then this good church elder offered to give my husband a "licking," and said if he didn't drive him he could quit, which he did.

We packed our goods and left them in the house until we could find some place to move, took a fourteen-months-old baby in our arms, together with a large handbag, telescope, etc., and walked about two and one-half miles to the depot, with seven horses standing in the barn.

The next place we got on a farm was a house consisting of two living rooms and two small bedrooms, with no well, cistern, cellar, woodshed, porches, window or door screens, no sod upon yard, no shade trees or anything else for comfort. We stayed three weeks and moved again and found living conditions slightly improved as we have more house room, a well, and well-sodded front yard, but no cellar, cistern or screen doors. But the sanitary conditions about the farm are perfectly awful.

The toilets on the majority of farms are wooden buildings, many of which have no pit under them, which was the case with two of the three places I have mentioned

Recently I noticed a muslin bag tied over the spout of one of these wells and, upon inquiry, found it was used to strain worms out of the drinking water. Another one of these wells is on sandy soil, the loose board cover on a level with the ground. The chicken coop is about eight feet to the right, the hog pen about ten feet away, and the open swill barrel within six feet of it. The wooden swill pails set in the swill barrel all the time. The hired man dips up part of a pail of swill, sets it upon the platform of the well and fills the pail. The result is that all which slops over or runs off the sides of the pail runs through the cracks directly into the water. This water also furnishes water for the house. In localities where there are no natural springs, the wells are usually good driven wells.

A cement platform would cost about \$1.50 or \$2.00 and would prevent much of this filth in the water.

A small garden is often mentioned in the bargain which the man is usually expected to work "odd spells," which means one end or the other of a fourteen to sixteen-hour day. If it ever gets plowed it usually grows up to weeds unless he has grown-up children or his wife tends it.

Saturday night he and his family walk or drive down town, to do the week's trading and find the local merchant's store-front decorated with some young village hopefuls, seated on a soap box, who aim such exceedingly witty and intelligent remarks at the passers-by that you wonder what school they graduated from and who their mothers are.

As far as our experience goes that is the extent of the hired man's social world.

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