

# FROM FLAT TO FARM

(By Arthur Winslow Tarbell)

The Editor was in the way recently of meeting a wise man. He denies his wisdom, and insists that his story isn't worth telling, but the Editor knows better. So the story you shall have, more or less the same as it was told one evening across the table.

"Ten years ago my wife and I had a fight, not between ourselves, I hasten to assure you, but against the sort of life we were leading. You couldn't have kept me on that stool another day, if you'd made me head of the firm. It was a wholesale hardware concern. I was on the books for \$20.00 a week; had been there, for a hundred years it seemed, and would be, likely enough, until the crack of doom. The air was pretty regularly bad in the office, we worked entirely by electric light, and a drilling machine kept pounding overhead all day. By going to the window I could see, occasionally, about a square yard of blue sky up between two ugly blocks, from one of which an ungainly chimney was always belching forth the blackest of smoke. But I didn't dare to go there very often; that bit of blue, and the world going by outside, only made me the more restless. The closer I stuck to my desk the less day-dreams got the better of me. My daily trick was to do the billing from G to M, in the alphabet of our customers, and a beautiful piece of monotony it was. Ledgers, folios, prices, discounts, credits, stock names and sizes—that was the sum total of my existence. I sat on that three-legged affair from eight in the morning until six at night, in a position that was suicide to the lungs. At noon I ran out and had a quick lunch, in a place so crowded that two or three men usually stood behind me, ready to jump into my seat when I had finished. By night my head was numb, and my sleep wasn't worth the name. In the morning it was a ten-minute breakfast, a kiss for Milady, and then off on the run for a car. We lived in a flat, with a Niagara of noise above and below, and rooms so small as to unpleasantly suggest Sing Sing all the time. My wife spent her days going through the same deadtiresome routine of household trifles. When evening came we were both too played out to keep awake, much less to be cheerful and optimistic. There was no time for reading, no opportunity to go anywhere or to make friends, no money for a little play now and then, and every day our courage, health, and spirits were dropping further below par. Now, if you call that life, all right. I don't, and didn't.

"After about ten years of that sort of thing, we finally awoke one stifling June morning, and said we'd had enough. We weren't going to be made fools of any longer. The grindstone had taken about all off our noses it was going to. A fine state of rebellion, you see, we were in. If there wasn't anything better in the world than a life like that, then the state of Denmark was indeed rotten to the core. If there was something better, we were going to find it. And we did.

"We had at that time about \$500 salted down in the bank for a rainy day. Milady and I then and there agreed that we'd rather get wet through to the skin on that particular rainy day, than to be unhappy on all the few thousand other days. So we decided to spend that \$500, if not altogether wisely, as wisely as we knew how. We put a lot of hard thinking into the thing, and the plan began to work itself out something in this way. That day, at noon, I ran uptown to a real estate office. Did Mr. So-and-so happen to know of any nice little place in the country, an abandoned farm or some such thing, that could be got cheap, dirt cheap? Mr. So-and-so most certainly did happen to know of just such a place, in fact, several just such places, cheap, dirt cheap,

all of them, and sure to suit us. Down from the top of his desk came a huge book, filled with photographs of exactly such paradises as we were looking for. The next day, with Milady's help, I made a list of the most likely ones, and the next, being the first day of my vacation, we started off, hand-in-hand in quest of the golden spot. I don't believe that Jack and Jill, when they began their famous hill-trip, were any more excited or enthusiastic. On the third day we found our El Dorado, twenty miles from the city, on the southern slope of a hill, as nice a little country cottage as the sun ever shone upon. Thirty acres; ten woodland, ten pasture, eight tillage, and two water. The rambling house, with ten rooms and a southern exposure, was on a knoll with a mammoth shade elm in front. Naturally, it had seen better days, but with a nail here and a board there, it could see some more of them, just as good. The barn was in fair condition, likewise the carriage-shed and hen-houses: There was a deep well of cold water, bucket and all, a pine grove, and in front, a delightful old-fashioned flower garden, with rows and rows of holly-hocks bowing welcome to us. The price? You won't believe me. It was just \$250, cash down, not a cent more nor a cent less. We took it on the spot. I wrote the firm that very night they could henceforth consider my stool vacant, as far as I was concerned. I believe I added something about having found the fountain of youth.

"The next week the city flat was a thing of the blank past. We were on the farm!—our country estate, if you say so. With the other two hundred and fifty, I got a very hopeless-looking, but cheap, horse, an equally melancholy looking cow, some hens, a pig or two, and a little lumber, with which I began to make the most necessary repairs. Then, of course, came the big question—how to make the thing pay? Should we raise garden truck or poultry? Or should it be some delicacy like frog's legs, or some fad like Boston terriers. Perhaps a milk farm would be the proper idea, perhaps, fruit orchards. We didn't know a thing about any of these ventures, but as the gods so far had been propitious, we were willing to chance it still further. Our hands were decidedly to the plough, and before we even thought of turning back, providence, in the somewhat shambling shape of our next-door neighbor, a mile away, came to our rescue by informing us that we had just the right sort of a place for raising chickens and ducks. So, for better or for worse, chickens and ducks it should be. To that feathered star we hitched our wagon and started off.

"Let me see—that was ten years ago. They say we're in clover now, neck high and full blossom. To put it modestly, the world is going very nicely with us. To put it financially, I am clearing about four thousand a year. We began with perhaps fifty hens and no help. The second year, we had some three hundred chicks and cacklers, and a man and his wife to ease our burdens, which they did to our entire satisfaction. Today, I daresay, we have something near five thousand pairs of legs running around our place, and a system of things that invites one to work just for the joy of the working. We do the planning; a gang of men does the rest. My whole output is taken by three big hotels in the city, with whom I made tip-top arrangements our third year. The breakfasting world, the year round, as you know, cries aloud for boiled chicken and fresh eggs, and whenever the cry is uttered in those three hotels, it's my particular pleasure as well as duty to furnish the wherewithal to answer that cry. We have, of course, acquired more land, put up some new buildings, and enlarged and improved our cottage, until we've got a very decently sizable place out there.