

ONLY a sweet and virtuous soul,
Like sweetened timber, never gives.

George Herbert

Why We Left the Farm

(Continued from last week)

LOUIS made light of my household tragedies, telling me Dora was doing the things he expected me to do when we first started to keep house; and, since he had made up his mind to see those things done, they were not troubling him in the least! When I became really distressed he sympathized with and comforted me as well as he could.

The remembrance of the kindness and patience with which he met every discomfort from me was the greatest help to me through the hard years that followed. For I could always realize that the real Louis was a good, kind man, and that only the hard requirements of farm life made him seem different.

A year from the day we moved into our new home our first baby was born. The roads, always in a fearful state at that season of the year, were then quite impassable. We had to send for an ignorant, stupid quack, whose sole recommendation was that he lived five miles nearer than a good doctor. I passed through two days of torment such as I hope even lost souls are not called upon to bear.

Though far more dead than alive when my baby was placed in my arms, I still had consciousness enough left to feel that I could get "bear all things, endure all things" for this, my own child. Louis voiced the same feeling in his own way a day or two afterward when he said playfully to the baby:

"Well, young lady, this old farm has got to get up and hustle after this to provide for your future."

I did not regain my usual buoyant health that summer. Before baby was two months old my cook had left me. She said she was sick; but the fact was she had learned enough from me to seek a place in town, and she was promptly did. We were too busy to hunt for another, feeling—as we did—that the search would be long, if not also rather fruitless.

And we lived near town. I could have sent out the washing and the sewing and had a woman in once a week to help me clean. As it was, the nearest laundry was twelve miles away, and no woman within ten miles of us was poor enough to do other people's work.

WHEN FAMILY PRIVACY IS IMPOSSIBLE

My husband had thrown himself into the farming with great vigor; and a sense of fairness, if nothing else, would have spurred me to keep even pace with him and do my part. So I made a study of systematizing my work; I made every movement count, as far as possible, toward some definite end.

My first care was baby. Nothing ever prevented me from keeping her immaculately clean, healthy, and happy. That I did not have leisure to envy her lowliness, and watch her little mind and body develop before my love, grieved me; but I told myself that this was the common lot of mo-

thers. That some who did have the leisure chose to spend it in social dissipations instead was to me unthinkable.

Besides doing the housework as I did the summer before, I was also trying to raise chickens enough for our own use. A man born and bred on the farm would as soon think of buying champagne for his table as chickens, though nobody likes to eat them better than he. Louis had bought me an incubator and a brooder, and I was highly successful with them. They took up more of my time than the old setting hens, but were less unpleasant to handle.

The young fruit vines we had planted last year were now bearing. Abundant strawberries, raspberries, and blackberries were to be picked. What we could not eat I must can or preserve. When I say I canned or preserved fruit I am dealing in terms of gallons and bushels—not the tiny glasses or pint jars town women use when they are canning. Moreover, it was all done over a wood range; and the carrying of the wood and water necessary was not the least part of the work. Though I was usually fed the wood-box and the water-bucket before leaving the house, they both seemed to be empty always.

"If the house were to catch fire this bucket would be the first thing to burn," he would sometimes good-naturedly grumble as he picked up the empty pail and started for the well.

Some of the men in the community were not so considerate of their wives. I had one neighbor—a second wife—whose husband, an ex-legislator called "highly educated" because he was a university man, was reputed to be worth seventy thousand dollars. Their cookstove was so old and dilapidated that three of its four legs were gone, and had been replaced by bricks, and it leaked ashes at every pore. He would never have her wood cut, and she was too proud to cut it herself. I have been in her kitchen when she had one eaten, and the treacherous stick in the stove for fuel, the rest of the branch projecting half-way across the room and supported by two chairs. As the end in the stove burned off, the remainder was gradually fed into the fire until the supporting chairs could be safely removed. Then another branch was brought to requisition. Poor woman! She is now dead, like her predecessor; and their well-preserved husband is industriously seeking a third wife.

I went absolutely nowhere that summer. The spring was late, and during the first rush of plowing my buggy horse was impressed—and

somehow it was never convenient to restore her to me. Sunday Louis professed to be too tired to go to church, and I did not insist on going. Secretly I preferred to spend this precious leisure in the intimate companionship of my baby or in reading when she was asleep. Louis spent the day in riding over the farm and planning the week's work. We had to give up reading together in the evening, and he never did a done before bedtime. My work-hardened hands refused to do my bidding at the piano, so I scarcely ever attempted to play. I passionately loved music, and to have to give it up was one of my most disheartening experiences. Of course we never had time for the pleasant walks in the woods and along the hedgerow now. We had a large, shady yard, and for her health's sake I kept baby out-of-doors most of the time; but neither of us ever got outside the yard.

That winter Louis brought the adjoining one hundred and sixty acres that he had often spoken of needing. The next spring, when hiring the new hands, he said to me: "Eleanore, can't you let two of the men eat in the house for the next three months? They can sleep over the toolshed and you will not be bothered with them except at meal-time. I don't want to put them up earlier if part of them are right here with me." At my dismayed look, he continued: "You know we have got to work harder to pay for that land."

So we took to getting up at four o'clock and there were four extra men to feed instead of two. They brought mud and bad odors into the house, and only had washed their faces and hands and wiped the rest of the dirt on the kitchen towels, so I was obliged to change them every meal. They ate in a slovenly manner, and the poor cleanliness presented its usual attractive appearance. What little conversation they held was about crops and crop conditions. My dining-room had become only a place for the work-stuff.

I had begun to suggest modern improvements for the house immediately after starting housekeeping and mentioned them again and again as the work grew heavier. But he always told to "wait until we get out of debt." Now it is a fact that hardly any of the big farmers are ever out of debt. When they are, they say that happy state of there is always a new piece of land to buy or new improvements in farm buildings or equipment to make. Rarely, indeed, is a sum large enough to provide bath, kitchen sink, furnace, and lights forthcoming for the home. The farmhouse is really the most important workshop on the place and invariably the poorest provided with labor-saving machinery—in this spite of the fact that the women of the family must do the work in the house while that elsewhere is done by hired laborers.

I began to look pretty bad. Aside from the fact that I no longer had the time to dress as carefully as before, to arrange my hair becomingly or fix the little accessories that are so much to a woman's appearance, I was so tired all the time that I looked positively ill. Louis felt called upon to remark on it.

"You work too hard by trying to keep things so clean. Let things go more. Eat off an oilcloth. Let the men eat their dessert on their plates, that's the best way to use 'em."

That we should have to eat off the oilcloth, and mix our pudding with the meat and vegetables on our own

plates, did not seem to occur to him to be an objection to the plan. We had an unusually good crop that year. We nearly paid for the one hundred and sixty acres in the fall, and Louis promptly bought eighty more, three miles from home. He also went to market and bought feeders—cattle to fatten on the abundant corn we had raised that summer. This necessitated keeping hands in the house as a winter, and he never requires great care—the men mowing may be lost. Of course the men could not sleep over the toolhouse in winter; so I had to prepare two extra bedrooms for the winter. I demonstrated manner of farmers, they in our living room when not at the work. The farm had now invaded the whole house. We had had no such privacy in our family life as boarding-house keepers.

All this time I hired help in the house whenever I could get anybody, which was not very often, for I did not stay with me long when I got them. "The work is too hard" was their invariable excuse. In vain I pointed out to them that they did not do nearly so much as I was compelled to do when I had no help, for I was never idle even when they were with me. One of them remarked witheringly that there was no sky's off her nose. She didn't propose to work herself to death for a lot of hired hands, even if I did!

THE TRAGEDY OF A KITCHEN SINK

LOUIS was not the least bit stingy about paying house-servants. He always wanted me to have them if they could be got without losing time from the farm work. Since the first summer of our marriage he had never done any of the laborious work, superintending the farm took all his time, and his labor was delegated to the men employed for the purpose. This was right and proper. The point is, conditions on the farm were such that he could get workers and I could not.

I had gradually got into the way of other country people; and a glance at these ways are almost a necessity. True, our vegetables have to be raised in abundance, and the farm table if these things are ever to appear there fresh, and it would be a wanton mismanagement to throw away the surplus. Since the year I can't stuff for winter. You have to kill your own hogs to have ham, bacon, and lard of the best quality. After the nightmare of hog-killing, time is safely over, the unused fat must be made into soap or other wasted. Turkeys, chickens, and eggs must be supplied for the table. It is really no more trouble to provide than to make a big grocery bill. Milk and butter are used abundantly for the home. Skimmed milk is absolutely essential to the raising of the young pigs. Who would think of feeding the cream to them, also, instead of making it into zolden butter for the market basket?

In fact, the greater part of my neighbor women paid all grocery bills with these things; and some of them even had enough left to buy some longer or piece of furniture occasionally.

It was about this time that I began to feel the strain of farm life in my spirit. Heretofore, though it usually went to the bone, it did not every bone and muscle to add to my discomfort was almost wholly physical. I adored my husband and my baby. We had good health and no work week.

(Continued next week)

The ironing table should be of height suitable for a woman to stand on enough to cause the worker to stand in a stooped position, nor so high as to necessitate the lifting of the shoulders while ironing.

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How a Farm

T. G. Raynor.

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