

AMATEUR FARMING.

From a Letter in reply to a Communication from a friend, on Farming.

My farming, of which you make so black an account, is at an end—Othello's occupation's gone—I have in disgust thrown all up, the unpleasant feeling has worn off, and I can now laugh with the best of them, at myself. I made known my intention to you to purchase a few acres; you said nothing to dissuade me from so doing. I bought, and thinking the next step in life was to acquire some knowledge of agriculture, I determined to manage it myself; perhaps I should have said mismanage. I had no conception of the interest taken in these pursuits; my anxiety, at first pleasing, soon became so intense as to be perfectly painful. I will not tire you with an account of all my minute concerns—you have well described them by asserting they would afford no rest. But so had I been given up to other, I may say quite other, pursuits, that though for a time I had with much resolution discarded them they would force themselves upon my mind, when I was striving to fix it upon matters relating to my new occupation. The effect was, that I began to be a cold utilitarian, and to look upon my former studies with something like contempt—then as enemies. This was a lamentable state; I had forsaken the delight of all my days, and resembled Cowley's state, described by him in the "Abeysance of Love,"

"Thousand worse passions then possessed
The interregnum of my breast."

I felt degraded, for I had lost one ingredient of happiness, and certainly not found another. And I found that I was, in all proper knowledge that should become a man (i. e. a farmer) decidedly inferior to the lowest of the grade. I am afraid, had prosperity crowned my little attempt, I should have become penurious and avaricious. I was the glass-seller in the "Arabian Tale," in building castles, and destroying the means whereof to build them. I will not be wearisome by enumerating all my little disasters, but merely tell you how I managed about my sheep. I had a day-laborer who served me as a hind: he was a faithful and honest fellow, I believe; but a bit of a wag; he had a dry humour about him, not that I, by any means, would say he did not do his best to moisten it; he was about forty years of age, a little man, every feature of his face seemed to have a screw in it, which he could move either way at pleasure; whenever he spoke seriously he always looked straight at a wall, (if one was near him), or the bole of a tree, or, if no such object presented itself at his fingers, (and they looked like things grown out of rough ground;) but whenever there was a sly meaning in what he had to say, he always looked up in your face, let out some of his screws, and tightened others, and nearly half-closed one eye, and all but quite the other, and inclined his head a trifle towards the right shoulder. This would have amused me, but I soon discovered that it was his usual mode of telling that something or other went wrong, something out of its usual course, which he meant to show went wrong through my fault. But "re-venous a nos moutous"—my first purchase of sheep happened thus: I was recommended to send to the fair of —, and told what I ought to give for half a score of ewes. Before the fair day, however, as I was walking along the road, near my garden gate, I met a large flock of sheep, and some drovers. I found they were going to the fair. Here, thought I, is an opportunity not to be lost—no trouble of sending to fair—and a manifest saving in having them driven home; I found, too, the price was much under what I was told to give, so I thought myself perfectly safe: sheep were sheep, and the sheep I bought—and without the aid of my man. When he came up, (as he was sent for to put the sheep in the field,) I said with an air of some importance, never having been the master of so many animals before, "Here, Richard, I have bought to-night these sheep." "Which, sir," said he, "ewes or wethers?" I am ashamed to confess, Eusebius, that I did not know; it was provoking—I looked like a fool. The man I had bought of, relieved me by pointing out my purchase, and Richard was for a time too busy to notice me. "These are pretty lightfoots," said he, with his arch look, "where shall I take 'em sir?" "Why," said I, "you know very well, to the field." "Oh, ay," quoth he, "but may be they won't like the field." I could not in the least tell what he meant, never having heard of consulting their liking. "Well," said he, "I'll drive them there, but if they don't like it they won't stop." "What do you mean?" said I. "Why, them sheeps be all greyhounds." Shortly after, I met a neighbor, and told him what a purchase I had made—"And where are they?" replied he. "In the field above the house," said I. "No, they are not," says he, "for I have just seen about that number break over hedges, and away with 'em, as fast as they could scamper—if those are yours you had better send after them"—and going off—

"When you've caught 'em, sell 'em." This was indeed a bad beginning. I went for my man—he looked this time in my face as I told my story—and told him to go after them. "Oh! there's not much use in going after them," said he, "at least not without a dog"—and away he went on the run. I, like a fool, I am ashamed to confess it, little dreaming he was gone to borrow a sleep dog, let loose my large Newfoundland, and away I went along the road as fast as my legs could carry me. About a mile on I found the sheep; that is, I came in sight of them, and pointed them out to the dog. Off went Neptune, and off went the sheep; I saw him plunge into the midst of them—he had brought down one, and the rest went farther than ever. He had, indeed, brought down one, and by the time I came up, had made a good hole in its side. The poor thing was killed sure enough. Now I didn't mind the loss of the sheep, but was in dismay at Richard's up-look, which I knew awaited me. I met it, and was humbled—"Your honor," said he, "had better keep a hunter and a pack of hounds, for them deer's capital sport, and I see your honor's in at the death." After much time, trouble, and cost, the sheep were recovered, and as my friend advised, sold, at a loss. It was amusing enough to Richard the day of the disaster. I returned in no very good humour, and finding two large pigs in the garden, made a boy, whom I had just hired, drive them instantly to the pound, and in the evening in came Richard with one of his looks, and asked for money to get the pigs out of the pound. "Out of the pound, said I, "I get them out of the pound! "why I've had 'em put in." "Then your honor," quoth Richard, "will be sure to get 'em out." "Not I," said I, indignantly; "let those get 'em out that own them." The fellow gave a double screw, and slightly curled his thin lips, and affecting great submission, replied in a low and slow voice, "Them is your honor's own pigs." This took me by surprise, effectually dissipated my bile, I threw myself back in my chair, and laughed out most heartily. Richard put his hand to his mouth, made antics with his knees to suppress his mirth; but it would not do. He gave way to his humor, laughed louder than I, and then as suddenly stopped—asked my pardon, adding—"Sure your honor knows best; but I think we'd better get 'em out this time, and punish them (with a marked emphasis) next."

My second purchase was still more unfortunate. This time I did not trust to my own judgment, but requested a neighbor farmer, who was going to a fair, to buy me six sheep. "Six sheep!" said Richard, who was present, looking up now at me and now at Farmer L—, "six ewes in lamb this time." He looked again at me, as much as to say, "I doubt yet if measter knows one from t'other." The six ewes were bought—twenty-five shillings a-piece. I had heard that a good shepherd knows every sheep in his large flock. I had the curiosity to study the physiognomy of mine: in vain, I never could tell one from the other, and judging from the inteness of my observation, I much doubt the fact. Well, I had now six ewes in lamb. These will produce me at least a lamb each; that will be twelve—twelve lambs—twice twelve, twenty-four—and so I went on counting, till (upon my fingers) I was master of a tolerable flock. In the morning before breakfast, if any met me, and asked me where I had been, the answer was, "To look at my sheep"—after breakfast, "to look at my sheep"—before dinner, "to look at my sheep"—after dinner the same. I was looking at my sheep all day, and "wool-gathering all night." I dreamed of them—was Jason going after the golden fleece—I was a shepherd king. Great things, they say, arise from small beginnings; so it was with me; wonderful speculations arose out of my six ewes in lamb. I did Richard the justice to tell him one day, that he was as watchful of my six sheep as I was. He gave one of his looks, and said, suddenly dropping his speech in great gravity, "They must be looked arter, for I question if 'twouldn't be best to send them to the butcher!" Send my six ewes in lamb to a butcher! Why send them to a butcher? thought I. Not long after, seeing Richard, I said, for something to say, "Well, Richard, have you seen my six sheep this morning?" "No, sir," quoth Richard, and then screwing up some and unscrewing others of his features, "I have seen five, for t'other's a mutton, and mutton your honor won't like to eat." One of my sheep was dead. The week following, another. I had now but four sheep out of six. "Bad work, Richard," said I, "four out of six." "Four sheep and two skins, your honor will please to count them," quoth the scrutinizing Richard. To make the best of it, and be beforehand with my joke to my friend Richard, I said to him, "Well, we have four sheep and two treasures of skins." "No, your honor, excuse me, you're wrong there, four sheep only, the skins were stolen last night. There was no standing this, it was so. The day after came the saddest news of all. Richard called me from my bed. "Them as took the skins," said he, "have come for the sheep—they're gone."

"Gone!" said I, "where?" "Most likely," replied he, "to Fair." "The fair! that's twelve miles off, Richard." "Yes, sir, and them as took 'em must have took 'em in a light cart, for two of 'em could never have gone there a foot, and be sure they're at the fair at L— by this time." Thus of my six ewes in lamb I had not even a skin. I thought it right to send after them, and accordingly Richard went, and returned the night following with my four sheep. The thief, either finding them not marketable, or from fear or other cause, had abandoned them, and they were found about a mile from the town. "I've brought 'em back," said he, "but I doubt if two of 'em be worth the fetching!" The following day another died, and within a few days another. My six sheep were now reduced to two. Richard had no confidence in their looks, and said if one would lamb it would be lucky. After a time they did lamb, and here was a circumstance I thought very odd, one lambed a day or two before the other. "Well, Richard," said I, jokingly, "we have now three of 'em." "Your honor won't have 'em long," was the reply, and ere many hours the lamb died. In a day or two the other ewe lambed—two lambs. One was taken from her, and put to the ewe that had lost her lamb. She smelled at it and kicked it away. It was then sent back to its own mother, but she would have nothing to do with it, butted it, and sent it packing. They were all of them put into a small orchard; it was quite curious and sad to see the little thing run first to one and then to another, and be rejected by both. Here Richard showed his knowledge. He made a sort of coat of the dead one's skin, and put it on the rejected living—on the "Disownd." The creature took to it immediately. I had now two sheep and two lambs, for my purchase of six; then one of the sheep and one of the lambs got bad heads, and Richard pronounced their doom and advised me to send them to the next fair—the lambs by this time were grown up to look as big nearly as their mothers—I took his advice, and to the fair he went with him, and brought me back £1 3s. 8d.; a pretty business this was—keep thrown away—nearly all the purchase money thrown away—nothing left but the remembrance of Richard's looks, sayings, and doings, which I doubt not, you, Eusebius, will think well worth the cost. I need not go on to tell you how the cow got staked, the horse wounded by a pick-run into him at hay-making, how the sow destroyed her young—these are minor annoyances. There were others much more serious, so that ere long I found my spirits slug; the love of farming, like most forced loves, departed from me, a general ennui came upon me. The "Majorque videri" came upon every trouble. I saw nothing in a pleasant light, for, as yet, I could not return to my former pursuits. The worst of care is, that it makes a man see, as it were, quite through the layer of pleasure and delight, that like a kindly atmosphere envelopes the world, down to the bare skeletons of things, and presents to the intellectual eye nothing but deformity. We became disenchanted, ungifted. As in the fabulous times, when gods mingled in the battles of men, there was a cloud removed from before the eyes of the heroes to enable them to see deities: so is it now removed by care to enable us to see devils. So much, Eusebius, are we deteriorated from the golden age. We are even beyond the iron, we live in an age of mud and ditch water, which is continually stirred into horrible commotion and restlessness, by the tempests of our own wilful passions.

After that splenetic burst, let me shortly tell you how I came to give up the whole concern. I had no sooner bought my lands than the agitation of the corn laws began. If successful, my land, I found, would inevitably go out of cultivation; perhaps the best thing that could befall it, while I continued to farm. The agitation would not be successful, said one, because the Premier thinks it madness and folly. "Very well," said I, "but he thinks the people's follies must be given into, and that modern ministers are not to govern, but be governed." "They won't ruin your land," said another; "but they are going to do it," said I. "There will be a revolution if they do," said he. There was a man once, said I, condemned contrary to the opinion of his lawyer. They are going to hang me, said the unfortunate. No, they won't, said the lawyer. But they have condemned me, said the unfortunate criminal, and I am to be hanged on Monday. They dare not, said the lawyer. But they will, I tell you, said the condemned. Let me see them do it, said the lawyer; I wish they would, that's all. Some such satisfactory result ended these discussions. I was like the man that said, if he had been bred a hatter, men would have come into the world without heads. I determined, therefore, to give up farming before it gave me up. I determined, therefore, to dispose of my foolish speculation, and have done so; yet, I cannot but tell you the last farming conversation between me and Richard. You know what a horrible season we have had. One day, as it was pouring rain, Richard said there was no help for it, but the—what