

The Farm Labor Problem.

The farm-labor supply continues, perhaps, the knottiest question in the agricultural world. Scarcity, and more particularly the inferiority of the help available, is hampering farm operations and making farm life more of a drudgery than it should be. A recent writer suggests that the source of the trouble lies in the common schools, wherein much that is taught alienates the child's thought and ambition from rural life, and imbues him with the conviction that manual labor is degrading. Doubtless, also, many country people are allured to the city, in quite a few cases to their disadvantage, by a roseate conception of city life and failure to take into consideration the drawbacks that attend it. Those who are chafing under the monotony of the country and thinking of moving to some urban center, would do well to peruse carefully the article, "What City Life Offers the Laborer," wherein a faithful effort has been made by a close observer in both country and city to dispel the glamor of city life, revealing some bald truths.

But reform of the schools will take a long while, and all the articles that can be published will have but small effect in staying the cityward drift. Meanwhile, the help problem presses for immediate solution, and as a means of throwing some light upon the situation, causes and prospects, with a view to suggesting some remedy, or at least an alleviation, we resolved to make the discussion of it a feature of this number by presenting a symposium of the ideas of some sound thinking practical farmers. The letters printed in this issue, as well as those reserved for later publication, will be read with eager interest, and not, we trust, without some profit.

What City Life Offers the Laborer.

Both city and country exist, and both are necessary. The city has its advantages and disadvantages. In spite of the cry about the high wages asked by farm laborers, the money wages paid in the city are still higher, and what weighs a good deal with many men—the hours of labor are defined. After six o'clock the workman's time is his own. It can be pointed out that some who have engaged in business in the city have made great fortunes. Seats of learning are there, also, and the opportunity is afforded of hearing lectures by the most eminent men of the day, and of seeing and hearing the most accomplished living artists in the various branches of art. And there is no lack of company. Whether at work or on the street, or in the evening, there need be none of the isolation of which some complain as the chief evil of life in the country. The advantages of city life are easily perceived. They are on the surface. The disadvantages are not so obvious, but not less real on that account.

One of the first things to strike disagreeably a family moving in from the country is the poor class of house they have to put up with. Accustomed to large, roomy houses and, if tenants, to merely nominal rents, they are astounded at the monthly stipend asked for an ordinary house, and thinking they cannot afford any such sum they prefer to accept cramped, poor accommodation, where they are a long time getting over the feeling of being crowded and uncomfortable. Many of the farm homes nowadays would, if in the city, rent for from twenty to thirty, and even thirty-five dollars a month. What is the mechanic or laborer to do? He cannot afford any such sum. He has to be content with quarters that are small or old or poor. Ten dollars a month seems to a man from the country a big rent to pay, but when he goes house-hunting in the city he finds that such places are scarce enough, and he will probably end by taking a house which at first sight he couldn't think of living in. Not only is the house likely to be small, but crowded in among others as well, and the small back yards—mere pens—and the restricted area in front tend to give a smothery feeling, until he gets used to them. The wage-earner in the cities and those who have moderate incomes say it is almost impossible to save anything. The wages which seem so good are somehow not good enough. House rent is not the only thing that costs; everything costs. As one man put it, "You can't get even an onion without paying for it," and the difference this makes in living expenses would not be credited by anyone who has not tried it. Besides the expenditure for things necessary there are also many chances and enticements to spend—every night something good going on, every day fresh calls, so that if there is money in hand it is very apt to go. Very few young men in town, though receiving good salaries, have anything left when next pay day comes. It has become the fashion to spend all as you go, and to go against the fashion, in this as in other matters, is proverbially hard. Of course there are exceptions. There are those who do not take in every show or entertainment, whose evenings are spent at home, and who, careful in dress and other expenses, are quietly laying by for the rainy day, but the rule is otherwise.

A man who for twenty years has worked for

one employer at the one kind of work, left his situation and went out some miles to a farm he bought because his health had failed on account of being indoors too much. He was one of the exceptions to the rule, in that, both as a young man and after he was married, he saved money year by year. Many a one who has gone into the city would, after a trial of it, like to buy a farm also, but cannot afford it. It is much easier to get into a city than to get out of it. This man did, however, and after a few years



The Cramped and Narrow Back Yards Give a Smothery Feeling.

on the farm says he has reason to be satisfied with the change, as he is in better condition financially and his health is much improved. He said, further, "I had a good boss and I could do about as I liked, but now I am free." We refer to this case to draw attention to the fact that work in the city, as compared with that in the country, is less healthful and more monotonous. Many envious thoughts of their city brothers have entered the minds of those laboring in the country in regard to the comfort in which they work. "They always have a roof over their heads and are dry underfoot whatever the weather may be." But there is not so much need nowadays, when the doctrine of fresh air and sunshine as the cure of many diseases is being preached, to point out that the open-air worker has the best of it. One has but to observe the men of some large shop during the noon hour in fine weather to know that they at least appreciate the fresh air. They sit in rows and groups outside, most of them smudgy with dust or grime, lingering until the very stroke of one. The monotony of the work, also, must be the reverse of exhilarating. The same hours, the same kind of work day after day, year after year. Few things are more pathetic than the sight of a laborer or mechanic beating out the span of his natural life, counting the minutes forenoon and afternoon, till twelve and six o'clock. What a contrast with the farmer whose lot is cast in the arena of nature, whose every duty has an interest of its own, and for whom the hours never flag. Farm labor may be hard at times, but to him who works intelligently in harmony with natural laws, striving continually to improve in methods and results, it is intensely interesting. His work



The House Doesn't Suit.

becomes a pleasure, and when work is a pleasure life is a pleasure. The workshop laborer exists about ten hours a day that he may live three or four in the evening. With the great majority the prospect is that this must be continued as long as their strength lasts or the wolf will enter the door. Having nothing ahead, their best hope for the future is that they may be allowed day after day to pick up their dinner pail and go to work as long as they are able, the dread constantly hanging over them that in their case, as in that of too many they may, when past middle age, be discharged without warning to make room for younger and more active men. The city is not a good place to bring up a

family. It is not good physically. Of 14,000 children examined in New York City, 6,294 were below a proper standard of health and strength. Sir John Gorst, in Parliament, spoke of the physical condition of Edinburgh school children, as disclosed by a test, as "shocking, perfectly appalling." Seventy per cent. of them were actually diseased. City children are behind their country cousins mentally. The principal of a large Canadian city school says that the average child from the country learns much better than the average city child. He gives as a reason that in the country child the reflective faculty has been more developed. His head is not filled continually with the buzz and clatter of the street. He has time to think. His muscles, also, get needed exercise in doing the chores which are a part of his duty, so that when he sits down at school he settles to his work better. The idle city child fidgets more, and his faculties, which at first sight seem brighter, being more superficial, he almost invariably falls behind in the race. The same authority is responsible for the statement that morally, also, the child brought up in the city has the disadvantage. The streets, his principal playground, are, especially after dark, schools of immorality and crime.

We close this recital of some of the disadvantages attending city life by an extract from Charles Frederick Goss on children: "Blessed is the child that grows up on a farm or in a country village. To have a whole country to range in (as I did when I was a boy), plenty of streams and ponds, sugar groves to go to in the spring, cider mills in the autumn, and almost every member of my father's church having a good farm where I was welcome to milk the cows and ride the horses, is to enjoy the best blessing that God can bestow upon a growing boy."

Suggests a Matrimonial Commission.

While crops are splendid, prices good, and things generally prosperous, still there is the great problem of how to get the work on the farm done. This question is with the farmer all the time—when he lies down to rest, when he gets up in the morning; it even haunts him in his dreams. A few of us are fortunate in getting good men, but we have to pay them very high wages, much higher than circumstances warrant; but then the general run of help that can be hired on the farm is what might be termed poor. This scarcity of help has been felt for some years, and it is getting to be a more serious question than ever. What are we going to do about it?

Let us study its causes. In our part of the country quite a number of our young men have gone to the Northwest and to New Ontario to get homes for themselves. We cannot blame them for this; it is natural and laudable that young men should have ambition to better themselves. A number have left the farm and gone to the cities to work in shops. Perhaps many of the farmers are to blame for this. Many of our farmers who employ help are not considerate enough of the feelings and tastes of those they employ. Many work too long hours and do a lot of unnecessary drudgery. Of course the chores must be done, but we should endeavor to make everything as convenient as possible and

save all the steps we can. The hired man should not be looked upon as a machine out of which we are trying to get all that we can. I believe that many of the young men who left the farms for the city have made a mistake; everything is not gold that glitters. I think that farmers make a mistake in hiring for the summer months. They would be better every way to hire by the year. It is not fair to turn a man out to winter anywhere he can. Several of my

neighbors have given their farms out on shares. The tenant does all the work, pays for the threshing, blacksmithing, etc., and gets the half of everything that is raised, from the newly-laid egg to the pure-bred calf or colt. When a good man can be secured this arrangement seems to work satisfactorily. And this system has another advantage: It forms a sort of stepping-stone between the position of hired man and that of farmer. I think it would be a great help if there were quite a few small holdings, where a working man could keep two or three cows, and work around amongst the farmers when he was not busy at home.

The farmer has now got so much improved