

This Wonderful, Beautiful and Incalculably Interesting Earth!

Continued from Page 15

A country life rather spoils one for the so-called luxuries. A farmer may, indeed, have a small cash income, but at least he eats at the first table. He may have the sweetest of the milk—there are thousands, perhaps millions, of men and women in America who have never in their lives tasted really sweet milk—and the freshest of eggs, and the ripest of fruit. One does not know how good strawberries or raspberries are when picked before breakfast, and eaten with the dew still on them. And while he must work and sweat for what he gets, he may have all these things in almost unmeasured abundance, and without a thought of what they cost.

A man from the country is often made uncomfortable, upon visiting the city, to find two ears of sweet corn served for twenty or thirty cents, or a dish of raspberries at twenty-five or forty, and neither, even at their best, equal in quality to those he may have fresh from the garden every day. One need say this in no boastful spirit, but as a simple statement of the fact; for fruits sent to the city are nearly always picked before they are fully ripe, and lose that last perfection of flavor which the sun and the open air impart; and both fruits and vegetables, as well as milk and eggs, suffer more than most people think from handling and shipment. These things can be set down as one of the make-weights against the familiar presentation of the farmer's life as a hard one.

One of the greatest curses of mill or factory work, and with much city work of all kinds, is its interminable monotony; the same process repeated hour after hour and day after day. In the country there is, indeed, monotonous work, but rarely monotony. No task continues very long; everything changes infinitely with the seasons. Processes are not repetitive but creative. Nature hates monotony, is ever changing and restless, brings up a storm to drive the hay-makers from their hurried work in the fields, sends rain to stop the plowing, or a frost to hurry the apple harvest. Everything is full of adventure and vicissitude! A man who has been a farmer for two hours at the mowing, must suddenly turn blacksmith, when his machine breaks down, and tinkers with wrench and hammer; and later in the day he becomes dairyman, farrier, harness-maker, merchant. No kind of wheat but is grist to his mill, no knowledge that he cannot use! And who is freer to be a citizen than he? Freer to take his part in town meeting and serve his state in some of the innumerable small offices which form the solid blocks of organization beneath our commonwealth.

What makes any work interesting is the fact that one can make experiments, try new things, develop specialties, and grow. And where can he do this with such success as on the land—and in direct contact with nature. The possibilities are here infinite: New machinery, spraying, seed testing, fertilizers, experimentation with new varieties—a thousand and one methods, all creative, which may be tried out in that great essential struggle of the farmer or gardener, to command all the forces of nature.

Because there are farmers, and many of them, who do not experiment and do not grow, but make their occupation a veritable black drudgery, this is no reason for painting a somber-hued picture of country life. Any calling—the law, the ministry, the medical profession—can be blasted by fixing one's eyes upon its ugliest aspects. And farming, at its best, has become a highly scientific, extraordinarily absorbing, and, when all is said, a profitable profession. Neighbors of mine have developed systems of overhead irrigation to make rain when there is no rain, and have covered whole fields with cloth canopies to increase the warmth, and to protect the crops from wind and hail, and by the analysis of the soil and exact methods of feeding it with fertilizers, have come as near a complete command of nature as any farmers in the world. What independent resourceful men they are! And many of them have also grown rich on money. It is not what nature does with a man that matters, but what he does with nature.

Nor is it necessary in these days for the farmer or the country dweller to be uncultivated or uninterested in what are

often called, with no very clear definition, the "finer things of life." Many educated men are now on the farms, and have their books and magazines, and their music and lectures and dramas, not too far off in the towns. A great change in this respect has come over American country life in twenty years. The real hardships of pioneering have passed away, and with good roads and machinery and telephones, and newspapers every day by rural post, the farmer may maintain as close a touch with the best things the world has to offer as any man. And if he really has such broader interests the winter furnishes him time and leisure that no other class of people can command.

I do not know, truly, what we are here for, upon this wonderful and beautiful earth, this incalculably interesting earth, unless it is to crowd into a few short years—when all is said, terribly short years!—every possible fine experience and adventure; unless it is to live our lives to the uttermost; unless it is to seize upon every fresh impression, develop every latent capacity; to grow as much as ever we have it in our power to grow. What else can there be? If there is no life beyond this one, we have lived here to the uttermost. We've had what we've had! But if there is more life, and still more life, beyond this one, and above and under this one, and around and through this one, we shall be well prepared for that, whatever it may be.

The real advantages of country life have come to be a strong lure to many people in towns and cities; but no one should attempt to "go back to the land" with the idea that it is an easy way to escape the real problems and difficulties of life. The fact is, there is no escape. The problems and the difficulties must be boldly met, whether in city or country.

Farming in these days is not "easy living," but a highly skilled profession, requiring much knowledge and actual manual labor, and plenty of it. So many come to the country too light-heartedly, buy too much land, attempt unfamiliar crops, expect to hire the work done—and soon find themselves facing discouragement and failure. Any city man who would venture on this new way of life should try it first for a year or so before he commits himself; try himself out against the actual problems. Or, by moving to the country, still within reach of his accustomed work, he can have a garden or even a small farm, to experiment with. The shorter work day has made this possible for a multitude of wage-workers, and I know many instances in which life, because of this opportunity to get to the soil, has become a very different and much finer thing for them.

A man who thus faces the problem squarely will soon see whether country life is the thing for him; if he finds it truly so, he can be as nearly assured of "living happily ever after" as anyone outside of a story-book can ever be. Out of it all is likely to come some of the greatest rewards that men can know—a robust body, a healthy appetite, a serene and cheerful spirit!

And finally there is one advantage not so easy to express. Long ago I read a story of Tolstoy's, called "The Candle"—how a peasant Russian forced to plow on Easter Day lighted a candle to his Lord, and kept it burning on his plow as he worked through the sacred day. When I see a man plowing in his fields I often think of Tolstoy's peasant, and wonder if this is not as true a way as any of worshipping God. I wonder if any one truly worships God, who sets about it with deliberation, or knows quite why he does it.

My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as showers "non the grass."—Deuteronomy 32, 11.

Editor's Note—David Grayson, the author of the above article, is the foremost writer on such subjects as this, in the world. He is the author of "Adventures in Contentment," "Adventures in Friendship," "Great Possessions," etc. These books breathe an atmosphere of the soil and rural life that cannot be found elsewhere. David Grayson is also a philosopher, with wonderful powers of getting down to the fundamentals of life. His books have resulted in the formation of Graysonian clubs all over America, for the study of rural nature and philosophy. They ought to be read more widely, for they contain something no other writer is able to give so well. The article in this issue is run by special permission of the American Magazine, for whom Mr. Grayson writes special articles of this character.



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