

portance as seen through the lenses of the little farm communities. A journey to the nearest city was more momentous than a trip to Europe now, a change of town officers more absorbing than a cabinet crisis in England, and the steeple of the little orthodox church towered higher than the cross of St. Paul's. The motions—and emotions—of the farmer were centripetal in every social and civic relation. The principle of association and neighborhood spirit both were most intense, expressed in the town meetings, the singing schools, the sewing society, "stripping character at home while it clothed the heathen abroad," and yet with a deeper significance than the satire of the "Widow Bedott Papers" can mask. Even the cramped dogmatism and fiery doctrine of the church had a value, too little recognized now, in strengthening the habit of association, and making the House of God a veritable "meeting house," in which the social threads of the community were knit more closely together. Much we may see in the social, religious and linguistic oddities of the time to waken humor. But the humor can never shift to derision, when we descry the fact amid the bigotry of opinion, the acuteness in bargain, the household economies not rarely debased into parsimony, that the shadows were silver tinged by neighborly kindness, by the bed-rock integrities, and that even the austere religion of the New England theocracy, not inaptly described as an ever brooding sense that something awful was always going to happen, yet had its useful function in the farm society.

The picture of the past changes into the sharper limnings of the present. It shows the New England farmer given the same amount of labor, economically bettered<sup>1</sup>. But what a shifting in his environment, in

his sentimental comforts, in his social status and in most of the prime elements of his content?

With the first coming of the railroad into New England, the town barriers which confined the energies of the farm communities began to sink. Thenceforth the world was open and the farm interest, before so concentrated and localized, began to be diffused. Following the railroad came the factory city and factory town, not only drawing away the farm youth and farm laborers<sup>2</sup>, but absorbing also the small factories planted on the New England streams. Coin-

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1 In all the computations which the writer has seen, and in not a few that he has made, the figures indicate that—chiefly owing to the cheapening of commodities by mechanical invention—the farmer buys in a cheaper market than, say, half a century ago, while most of his farm products command a higher price. But against him must be set the great increase of about 80 per cent. in the cost of farm labour. While no accurate general figures relating to his comparative lot can be given, owing to the uncertainties with much different articles enter into both consumption and production, there can be little doubt that the New England farmer, working as hard and practicing the same economies as in old times, would be better off now than then. Whether we ought to expect him to return to the awful toil in household and field of those days, is quite another question.

2 Taking the thirty-seven farm towns nearest the twelve cities of Connecticut—which are all factory cities—the loss in population during the census decade from 1880 to 1890 was about ten per cent. The twenty-two farm towns of the chief agricultural county in the State, all removed from cities, show a loss during the same decade of about seven per cent. Out of the 168 towns in Connecticut 100 towns, nearly all agricultural, show a loss in assessed property of almost \$19,000,000 during the last thirty years, although most of them are not far away from cities or factory towns. If there are any advantages of proximity of factory and farm, they seem to be more than counterbalanced by the deadly "drain" of the former upon the latter, especially in the matter of farm labor.