

The Single Woman in the Country

Can the Spinster Remain on the Farm and be Independent?

By ELIZABETH McCUTCHEON

had I been willing to accept a stick as you did." This reply illustrates the spirit of the times;

treated with the greatest of kindness in her old age would she not rather be independent than dependent?

And why should she not be independent? I read Mr. Nixon's article in the Exhibition Number of Farm and Dairy with much pleasure. Particularly did I appreciate the point he makes that the girls who stay at home should be paid for their services. Why not? When the son comes of age, if he stays at home he enters into a business like agreement with his father as to the wages he shall receive, and is not regarded as mercenary in the least. Why should the daughter be regarded as a minor child, a ward of her father or of some male relative, till legally delivered over into the care and keeping of her husband? If she paid for her services when mother leaves or the son's wife takes her place in the home, she will have money enough to make an independent start for herself. Have changes in economic conditions made a place for this woman on the Canadian farm?

A Self-Supporting Woman

Not far from one of our principal Canadian cities is a neat little fruit farm. This farm is similar to others in the neighborhood, but differs in this one particular—it is owned and operated by a woman. She is a spinster who had stayed with her mother till the first bloom of youth was over. Then she invested her savings in this small farm. With the assistance of hired help she produces the usual line of market vegetables and fruits. In addition to this source of income she makes a speciality of home-canned berries, which meet with a ready demand from a good class of customers. Of late years she has been going quite extensively into flowers and they are proving more profitable than market gardening.

Another country spinster of my acquaintance is making a speciality of producing flower seeds for the seedsmen. She made a modest start with sweet pea seed, and has gradually branched out until now she produces seed of practically all the flowers that will mature seed in this climate. She tells me that this work is very interesting as well as profitable. She, too, hires help during the busy season.

Still another friend who had always had charge of the poultry department in her old home has made it support her in her own home. I know of at least three spinsters, all fine, intelligent business women, who have made bees their standby, and they, too, are doing well.

Spinsters With Capital.

There is still another class of single women for whom I believe there is a place in the country if they wish to stay there. They are the ones whose parents have left them fairly well off, but still under the necessity of making their money work for them if they would live. If women of this class have a good knowledge of agricultural operations and are willing to learn more, I see no reason why they should not buy a farm and manage it. A writer in The Country Gentleman gives such excellent advice for spinsters of this class that I take the liberty of passing it on through Farm and Dairy:

"Avoid the middle-size farm," says the writer. (Concluded on page 23)

THE single woman in the country is often imposed upon. She is the emergency woman, the one always on hand when she is needed and, too often, the only one who is expected to serve without recompense. Too many country spinsters are like my Aunt Mary.

My earliest recollections of Aunt Mary are of an energetic capable woman who was all too ready to forget herself in her eagerness to help everyone who seemed to be in need of her assistance. Aunt Mary was never out of work. Her relatives saw to that. All of her sisters and brothers had married and were busy building homes of their own, and whenever housework got behind, or there was sickness in the family, it was always Aunt Mary who was called upon. My later recollections of Aunt Mary are of an old woman suffering from rheumatism and hardly able to look after herself. Her relatives for whom she expended her life without recompense regarded her as a pensioner. She had no money or home of her own.

Let us glance at the other side of the picture. In a city family where I used to visit in summer holidays there were four girls. They are now grown up to womanhood. Three of them have married and have homes of their own. One of them is a trained nurse and a spinster. She has nursed all of her sisters through their sicknesses and is always on call when the children have serious ailments. She is no more efficient, however, than my Aunt Mary, even if Aunt Mary did lack the special training. Her sisters have not the face to ask her to drop her work and come to their assistance as an emergency nurse without recompense. They expect to pay her regular salary, and Flora expects to get it, and does.

A Census Conundrum.

One of the most startling facts brought out by the last Dominion census was the disproportion of the sexes in country districts. If I remember rightly there were only one or two counties in all of Ontario that did not have more males than females in the rural districts. The census did not show that this disproportion was due to the birth-rate. May not the picture that I have just painted, of the conditions surrounding single women in the country, as contrasted with conditions in the city, explain in some measure at least for the paucity of rural female population? In the past the country has not offered the same opportunities for self-support as has the city. Of yet greater moment is the attitude of country society towards its spinsters. Wholesome self-respect requires her emigration to the city.

My grandmother married in her teens. So did most of the girls in her day. Mother married in her twenties. Now it is the glory of women that they are absolved from the necessity of marrying to avoid eating the bitter bread of dependence. Woman-to-day is self-sufficient, and consequently marriages are made later in life. A tactless, shallow, married woman once intimated to an unmarried friend that she was single because she had not the chance to marry. Quickly came the reply: "I could have married several times



She Invested Her Savings in a Fruit Farm and the opportunities that the city offers are largely responsible for it.

Spinsters Because Self-Sacrificing.

I know of many spinsters who are such because of self-sacrificing devotion to their parents. Who of us cannot call to mind the daughter who felt it her duty to stay with mother and father, even though it involved saying no to the man of her choice. Every community has its woman or women who have stepped into their brother's household to take care of his orphan children just because of pity for their motherless condi-



She Made Poultry Support Her in Her Own Home

tion. If those who choose this self-sacrificing sphere are not paid for their labor, what have they ahead of them? Dependence, a thing which every self-respecting woman shuns. When old and helpless, their existence may be a continual misery because of the ingratitude of those whom they have served. This may not be always the case, but even if the spinster were