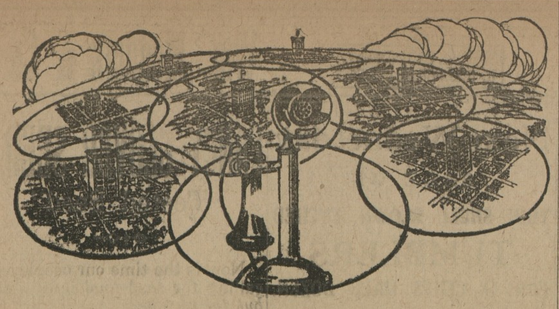


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FARMERS' BOY AND GIRL.

ARTICLE VI.

The most interesting subject to-day (to any man who thinks much about rural life) is that which centers around the boy and the girl, growing up on our farms. All other questions pale before this. The crop we are hoping to reap is dependent upon the seed we plant more and more. Is the farmer beginning to realize, that if he does not sow good seed, his crop will be a failure. Greater attention is now being paid to the quality of seed than to anything else. The boy and girl of to-day will be the man and the woman of the future. They are our seed corn. The character of that man and woman will determine the character of the country in their day. That is it which makes this such a deeply interesting subject. Kent county is to-day what the boys and girls of a generation ago are making it. The Kent of forty years hence will be what our children make it. Have we improved on what our fathers left us? Will our children take up the farms which we to-day are occupying, and make them what they are capable of being?

From head of Sassafras to the lowest point of Eastern Neck Island, the writer has known the country for half a century. He has ridden the roads as few other men have and is familiar with every locality. As he rides them to-day he tries to recall the impressions made upon him in his boyhood and early manhood. Making all due allowance for the distorted visions of youth, he can see but few changes for the better in that period. The disappearance of large bodies of woodland together with the old worm, post and rail fences and thorn hedges, are of course most noted. The country has opened up wonderfully. That is a questionable improvement. Here and there, the old residences have been modernized and new houses have been built, villages have sprung up at many of the cross roads, and there has been progress. But it is not a progress for which we can take much unction to our souls.

We have lived in a transition period, when many and great changes have been made and that suddenly. The older citizens have found it difficult to adjust themselves to these changing conditions. The rising generation will doubtless fall upon better times, when there will be more stability in everything.

When our forefathers took up this land they settled on it. They had good material to build with, and they built well. They expected their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren to take their places. They strove to leave them a goodly heritage. Their children were to the "Manor born" and to the "Manor" they staid. They took great pride in being able to take up life where their fathers left it off. They loved their old homes and they cared for them. Those old homesteads are to-day the most attractive places in the county. Their very beauty and attractiveness give evidence of the love and care that was bestowed upon them.

The boy and girl of to-day has lost, or is rapidly losing that pride in the old homestead, which was characteristic of the boy and girl of a generation gone by. It was a wholesome sentiment, which did much to make country life attractive. Most naturally it is the fore runner of that pride of county and State, which made its possessor willing to spend and be spent for their good. The farms of Kent have furnished many good men for church and State; men who have filled their place in life most creditably. Many of them have remained at home and are now filling places in public life; many have gone out from our midst, to other communities where they rank among the foremost citizens in the places of their adoption. In recalling the names of not a few of these, I feel a just pride in the farm boy. Many of the most prominent men in our great cities began life on the farm. It was there they developed those qualities which enabled them to come to the front when the opportunity presented itself. For the past fifty years the trend has been from the farm to the city. The country has felt and is sadly feeling to-day, the loss of her best and most enterprising sons and daughters. There is not a farm that has not lost in this respect. The great outside world calls in the most flattering way. The call is heeded and they go. The future for country life is not the brightest. There are some indications that this outgoing tide is beginning to turn. Many are beginning to tire of the rush and push of the city life, and are turning longing eyes to the peace and quietness of the country. Bricks and mortar become exceedingly monotonous. They do not take the place of green earth. Sky-scrapers are not as pleasing to look upon as trees, nor do the sounds of a busy city soothe, as do those of the country.

How may we counteract this trend to the city and make country life so attractive and remunerative as to hold our children? is a question of the gravest importance. The life we lead must have something in it that is *attractive*, or we will soon be casting about and devising means, whereby we will be enabled to desert it. It must also be *remunerative*. It must repay us for the time, energy and talent we bestow upon it, or necessity compels us to seek that which *will* repay us. Love for the locality and enjoyment in the work, goes a long way towards making us stick to that work. But this alone is not sufficient. There must be a living in it or no man can afford to pursue that mode of life.

The first step towards inducing the boy to stay on the farm is to make it attractive to him. We should endeavor to impress upon him from the very beginning that external show does not make a man. That the true man is he who lives soberly, righteously and Godly, who makes an honest living for himself and those dependent upon him, and whose big heart overflows in kindly feeling for others. There are many false notions which must be crowded out by instilling into him the highest and best ideals of life. We cannot begin too early in directing the boy's life. A mother once asked when she should begin to teach her child. "How old is he?" was the question of the wise one from whom she sought the information. "Three days," was the answer. "Then you have lost just three days." Where will and energies are properly directed, and where the taste is cultivated, the boy soon loves to take an interest in his mode of life. Living things attract the average boy. He loves animal pets, a pig or a lamb or a calf will appeal to him. Let him have one entirely his own, teach him to be kind to it, make him realize it has a money value. When it is sold, give him the money to spend as he see fit, under the mother's direction. In doing this you have taught him many lessons. But the most important of them all is, you have taught him to love and take an interest in his surroundings.

The boy likes to do things on a farm; he likes to be among the stock, and will take to any work where he has to manage a horse. It is surprising how much even a small boy can do. He should not be called upon to do more than he is physically capable of doing. The moment he tires the work should cease. "If you want to make Jack love his home don't bear too hard on the grindstone," is an old addage which every father should bear in mind. Many a most promising horse has been ruined in the breaking. A colt once over driven rarely develops into a first-class horse. That one drive has taken out of him all the promise that was in him, henceforth he is a mere plug. So it is with the boy, he turns with disgust from a life that has once been made burdensome to him.

The attractiveness of any work is largely dependent upon our capacity for doing that work well. An expert always enjoys his job. It may be ever so irksome to others; it is not so to him, for he knows how to do it with perfect ease; it is a matter of pride to him. That which makes farm life unattractive, is that few know how to do it. I speak from experience. Farming as a science is still in its infancy. We are just learning the A, B and C of it. If it is to become attractive to the young man, he is to learn it well. The future farmer has more in his favor than his predecessor had. His opportunities are wonderfully greater in every way. The state and government is coming to his aid, and the science of his occupation is being taught him. It is up to parents now to give their children the advantages within their reach. But alas, parents themselves, are slow in realizing the situation, and their children are sadly lacking in ambition. Prejudice against what is known as "book farming" and perfect contentment with existing conditions are sadly retarding progress. I have approached three most likely young men within the past six months and urged them to attend the short course at the M. A. C. They all three turned down the propotion as something they had never heard of before, and as totally unworthy of a moment's thought. They had no desire for anything better. Here were men, mentally and physically capable of greater things than being mere corn field hands, but lack of ambition is leading them to choose a life of plodding and druggery instead of the other. What is sadly needed is an *arousal* of ambition on the part of the farmers' boy for something beyond what he now has. His present ambition it to own a horse and buggy. When his day's work is done he swallows a hasty supper and off he goes to the nearest village where he meets others with no higher ambition than he has; or if it is in season, you will find him at our summer resorts where his mind is being poisoned by evil companionship. He has cut aloof from books since he passed out of the fifth or sixth grade at school. He is not a reader and takes no interest in home affairs. Here and there you will find a boy who is different, who realizes his deficiences, whose ambition is aroused and who is forging himself to the front.

There seems to be a sad deficiency somewhere in the general make-up of many country boys so far as bettering conditions are concerned. When we have aroused their sleeping energies, we will have made a long step towards making country life more attractive.

"Faithful are the wounds of a friend." The tender all-sympathizing surgeon sometimes has to cut deep with his sharp knife. It is my longing desire to better conditions that makes me write plainly under this head. My opinions are the result of many years of the closest observance and most intimate association with the farmer's family.

Spending the night with a close friend who had a likely son about seventeen years of age, I noticed the boy run out his buggy and harnessed a horse when he finished his evening chores. At supper he ate as though he had to meet a train; when he had finished, without a word of excuse or apology, he arose in haste and presently drove rapidly away. The father turned to me in apparent distress and said, "he does that every evening and does not come back until nearly mid-night. Where he goes I don't know, he is a stranger at home, what am I to do?" That was a puzzling question. It was good material going to waste.

The man who has the required gifts would do a grand thing for this and all other counties in this state if he consecrated his life to the arousal of ambition on the part of the farmer's boy to *higher* and *better* things. It is in the boy; oh, for the power to bring it out of him! Farm life would be infinitely more attractive (in every way) if we would awake to its possibilities.

This article is already too long for me to say much about the *remuneration* there is in farming. Compared on the one hand with some of the great businesses of life, farming does not show up well, and is not attractive; compared on the other hand with many of the occupations which seem so inviting to the man of ordinary ability and means, farming shows up wonderfully well. It furnishes more and better living under vastly more wholesome conditions to a larger number of independent people than any other occupation in which men are engaged.

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