

**FARMING**

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**RICHARD KENDALL MUNKITTRICK & ARTHUR BURDETT FROST**

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UNIV. OF  
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# FARMING



UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

I HAD always had a wild ambition to be a farmer, and be far from the hurly-burly of metropolitan life. Of farming I knew nothing but what I had heard from people who delighted in ridiculing its independence, as well as in looking at it from a serious standpoint, in order to prove it a comic occupation. I knew very well that Horace and Washington had tilled the soil, and that it would be nobler to farm with them than to ridicule farming with a number of well-meaning bookkeepers. I had frequently stood before print-shops, and noticed the steel engraving of the children in the impossible raiment gathering apples, which, while on the bough, were all outside the leaves to make a rich display. If such golden prosperity can shine on a steel engraving, I often thought, what must it be in reality?

My friends, who delight in jesting on the subject of farm life, always made it a point to depict the farmer's independence by giving an unhallowed description of the amount of labor he had to perform daily—or rather daily and nightly, for they claimed his work was never half done. If any one could detect any independence in that, they would like to see it. A man going out in a thunder-shower to find a stray cow by lightning at midnight, and getting lost himself, was a familiar picture of the farmer. Allusions to his boots, so rigid that the insteps were inflexible, were also freely indulged in.



I argued that the farmer had some independence in that he was always at home under his own vine and apple-tree, that he didn't have to rise with the lark to catch a train, and that when age came along he wouldn't be thrust aside as unavailable timber by an employer who would make room for a son-in-law. "Suppose he does feed the pigs by starlight?"

Is that any worse than your remaining at the office all night to find the seven cents necessary to balance the books?"



I never wanted to be what may be termed a merchant farmer. By merchant farmer I mean the man who sells all the delicacies he raises and lives on pork. My idea was to sell the pork and live on the spring chickens.

I had lived in a small country place before. Here every man was what might be called a polite far-

mer. He had his farming done for him, while he attended to a more lucrative business in the city. The man who owned a valuable herd of cattle, and sold milk—just to pay him for the fun he was having—was facetiously known as the banker milkman, while his neighbor was equally well known as the dry-goods rose-grower. It was never my dream to farm for money. I only wanted a living, as that was all I could get out of anything else. In such a position a panic would affect me no more than a dust cloud would a hen, and I could smoke my corn-cob pipe of peace, and playfully count the spots on the pig, and never think of the momentous question, "Whither are we drifting?"

The things known as the most difficult to raise I would leave alone. I would go in largely for apples, because they are raised more by the tree than the farmer. In fact, the tree could not stop bearing if it tried. If I had more apples



than I could use, I could exchange them for something else; and if I should fail in this, I could dry them; and if the trees should die, they would still be eligible for the iron dogs of peace.

The worst thing to be contended with would be the failure of the crops. But even if the crops should fail, I could still fall back on the chickens, providing, of course, they should not be stolen during the night.



I could guard against such a calamity by having the hens sleep in a high tree, and locating a mastiff under it. I had already learned that there are hens and hens; that the hen that is supreme on the table is not always the most prolific layer, and that certain specimens that are famous for their laying qualities are as dry as bone on the table. I concluded that the better plan would be to keep the hens of the dry meat. Then I

would have all the eggs I could eat; and when it came to the prandia part of the business, I could fricassee the chickens, with a duck interpolated for moisture.

Ah, what a peaceful, happy life! What an ideal existence! What a smooth, meandering river of rippling joy! To be able to live without dressing to look like a fashion plate. To be free to retire at 8 P.M., and not have to sit up until 11 for fear of some one calling.

Phillada was as much carried away with the idea as I was myself. To be sure, it would cut us off from the theatres and art galleries, but we could have a picture-gallery around us all the year, and enjoy our pictures in the various phases they would undergo through the changes of the seasons. If a Corot cost ten thousand dollars, what a boon to have an acre of Corots for two hundred dollars, and no extra expense for frames!



The men working in the potato-patch, against the gathering shadows of the after-glow, would be a Millet etching of endless joy; and when that indignitary known as the hired man should be called upon to capture the horse in the clover-patch, the lively actions of the pair would be a Bonheur with pleasant variations.

"But there is one thing I must do first of all."





"What is that?" asked Phillada.

"I must have a doctor order me to try it. If we go from preference, we shall be laughed at, especially if we should return. But if it be simply a question of health, it will be self-preservation, and the sympathy of our friends will be lavished upon us. And then,

should we return, we can say we were stricken with malaria, and came back for the same reason that we went, namely, health. This sound argument can be garnished with jokes, such as an account of the girl's sweeping the snow-drifts out of the farm bedroom after every storm, and of the wind careering through the knot-holes in the floor, and agitating the carpet into gentle ripples, after the manner of a theatrical ocean."

That morning I went down town dreaming of cows wading through silver brooks in the silhouette of the spreading elm, of breezes swaying festoons of golden honeysuckle on the front porch, of bees droning in the drowsy garden, of butterflies tilting on hollyhocks of every color, of the corn rustling in sunny fields, and of the bobolink pouring forth his soul while wandering, fancy free, above the fragrant clover.

On the way up town, I dropped in on the doctor.

"I see," he said. "A sedentary occupation, and no exercise. The thing you need is not medicine, but an out-door life. If you could get out of town, where you could work in the garden an hour or two every day, you would be a new man in a month."

"I have always had a wish to be an amateur farmer," I replied, with a laugh.

"Go and be one," he said; "and you will be all right."

I never paid more cheerfully for anything in my life than I did for that advice, and I walked home so briskly that no one would have suspected that I was about to do anything for my health.

“What did the doctor say was the matter with you?” asked Phillada.  
“Nothing,” I replied; “but I’ve got to go to the country for it.”  
We never before experienced such happiness in our flat as this prospect of getting out of it.



## II

IT is not always the easiest matter to decide how to go about a thing after you have made up your mind to do it. Every one knows where to go for the best Spanish olives, or the finest hats; but no one that dispenses farms seems to have a better reputation for reliability than any one else. The papers are generally supplied with the cards of people who would like to sell first-class farms on terms to suit the purchaser, but they are apt to be misleading as regards fidelity to facts. The purring crystal stream that meanders over beds of golden gravel, upon inspection, turns out to be too shallow for ducks, and to furnish a cress which generates typhoid fever. The fine out-buildings seem to retain their standing attitude by the merest chance, and to satisfy the beholder that cattle should be kept outside of them for fear of their falling on them. The sumptuous farm-house itself is usually a rambling structure, heated by stoves, if the stoves are sufficiently powerful. Aside from these facts I knew nothing of farming.



At the suggestion of Phillada I went at once to a news-stand and purchased a morning paper.

"We had better go about it at once," she said; "for fear of changing our minds."

"I cannot stay here," I replied, solemnly, "when the doctor says I should go to the country. It is a duty I owe to you and Philip."

"There is another thing," she went on, "and that is this—we must give the place a name, no matter what kind of place it is. I propose we call it Dove's Nest, or Barberry Bower."