

seng, sweet flag, goldthread, or Indian turnip. To be sure, all these, and more beside, are somewhat valued as medicines by mother or grandmother, and, when washed and dried, are often added to the store of roots and herbs kept in the attic; but I suspect the real reasons for the enthusiastic searching for them and their like are the love of strolling and the natural passion for digging. Thoreau remarks that agriculture, in its most primitive state, belongs alongside of the venerable arts of hunting and fishing, which, he says, "are as ancient and honorable trades as the sun and moon and winds pursue, coeval with the faculties of man, and invented when these were invented." The very smell of newly upturned soil arouses instincts and impulses that doubtless are heritages from our most primitive ancestors. Is it not the unconscious delight of sniff-

ing in the nameless, revivifying odor of the fresh brown earth that leads children to the fields, to follow the furrows as happily as their companions, the cheerfully talking blackbirds, which come to seize the food providentially thrown up for them by the gliding plough?

Children fortunately often keep enough sweet savagery, so that if turned out of doors they go straight to their own. With little knowledge of names save those of their own coining or the popular ones of their neighborhood, many a time they could lead the scientist to the chosen retreats of rare local plants, and point out nest or lair of shy wild creatures. If anything could justify the common assumption that in childhood we relive the golden age of the race, it is the possibility of this unconscious but profound childish sympathy with Nature's heart.

Fanny D. Bergen.

THE ISOLATION OF LIFE ON PRAIRIE FARMS.

IN no civilized country have the cultivators of the soil adapted their home life so badly to the conditions of nature as have the people of our great Northwestern prairies. This is a strong statement, but I am led to the conclusion by ten years of observation in our plains region. The European farmer lives in a village, where considerable social enjoyment is possible. The women gossip at the village well, and visit frequently at one another's houses; the children find playmates close at hand; there is a school, and, if the village be not a very small one, a church. The post wagon, with its uniformed postilion merrily blowing his horn, rattles through the street every day, and makes an event that draws people to the doors and windows. The old men gather of summer evenings to smoke their pipes and talk of

the crops; the young men pitch quoits and play ball on the village green. Now and then a detachment of soldiers from some garrison town halts to rest. A peddler makes his rounds. A black-frocked priest tarries to join in the chat of the elder people, and to ask after the health of the children. In a word, something takes place to break the monotony of daily life. The dwellings, if small and meagrely furnished, have thick walls of brick or stone that keep out the summer's heat and the winter's chill.

Now contrast this life of the European peasant, to which there is a joyous side that lightens labor and privation, with the life of a poor settler on a homestead claim in one of the Dakotas or Nebraska. Every homesteader must live upon his claim for five years to perfect his title and get his patent; so that if there were

not the universal American custom of isolated farm life to stand in the way, no farm villages would be possible in the first occupancy of a new region in the West without a change in our land laws. If the country were so thickly settled that every quarter-section of land (160 acres) had a family upon it, each family would be half a mile from any neighbor, supposing the houses to stand in the centre of the farms; and in any case the average distance between them could not be less. But many settlers own 320 acres, and a few have a square mile of land, 640 acres. Then there are school sections, belonging to the State, and not occupied at all, and everywhere you find vacant tracts owned by Eastern speculators or by mortgage companies, to which former settlers have abandoned their claims, going to newer regions, and leaving their debts and their land behind. Thus the average space separating the farmsteads is, in fact, always more than half a mile, and many settlers must go a mile or two to reach a neighbor's house. This condition obtains not on the frontiers alone, but in fairly well peopled agricultural districts.

If there be any region in the world where the natural gregarious instinct of mankind should assert itself, that region is our Northwestern prairies, where a short hot summer is followed by a long cold winter, and where there is little in the aspect of nature to furnish food for thought. On every hand the treeless plain stretches away to the horizon line. In summer, it is checkered with grain fields or carpeted with grass and flowers, and it is inspiring in its color and vastness; but one mile of it is almost exactly like another, save where some watercourse nurtures a fringe of willows and cottonwoods. When the snow covers the ground the prospect is bleak and dispiriting. No brooks babble under icy armor. There is no bird life after the wild geese and ducks have passed on their way south. The silence of death

rests on the vast landscape, save when it is swept by cruel winds that search out every chink and cranny of the buildings, and drive through each unguarded aperture the dry, powdery snow. In such a region, you would expect the dwellings to be of substantial construction, but they are not. The new settler is too poor to build of brick or stone. He hauls a few loads of lumber from the nearest railway station, and puts up a frail little house of two, three, or four rooms that looks as though the prairie winds would blow it away. Were it not for the invention of tarred building-paper, the flimsy walls would not keep out the wind and snow. With this paper the walls are sheathed under the weather-boards. The barn is often a nondescript affair of sod walls and straw roof. Lumber is much too dear to be used for dooryard fences, and there is no inclosure about the house. A barbed-wire fence surrounds the barnyard. Rarely are there any trees, for on the prairies trees grow very slowly, and must be nursed with care to get a start. There is a saying that you must first get the Indian out of the soil before a tree will grow at all; which means that some savage quality must be taken from the ground by cultivation.

In this cramped abode, from the windows of which there is nothing more cheerful in sight than the distant houses of other settlers, just as ugly and lonely, and stacks of straw and unthreshed grain, the farmer's family must live. In the summer there is a school for the children, one, two, or three miles away; but in winter the distances across the snow-covered plains are too great for them to travel in severe weather; the schoolhouse is closed, and there is nothing for them to do but to house themselves and long for spring. Each family must live mainly to itself, and life, shut up in the little wooden farmhouses, cannot well be very cheerful. A drive to the nearest town is almost the only diver-

sion. There the farmers and their wives gather in the stores and manage to enjoy a little sociability. The big coal stove gives out a grateful warmth, and there is a pleasant odor of dried codfish, groceries, and ready-made clothing. The women look at the display of thick cloths and garments, and wish the crop had been better, so that they could buy some of the things of which they are badly in need. The men smoke corncob pipes and talk politics. It is a cold drive home across the wind-swept prairies, but at least they have had a glimpse of a little broader and more comfortable life than that of the isolated farm.

There are few social events in the life of these prairie farmers to enliven the monotony of the long winter evenings; no singing-schools, spelling-schools, debating clubs, or church gatherings. Neighborly calls are infrequent, because of the long distances which separate the farmhouses, and because, too, of the lack of homogeneity of the people. They have no common past to talk about. They were strangers to one another when they arrived in this new land, and their work and ways have not thrown them much together. Often the strangeness is intensified by differences of national origin. There are Swedes, Norwegians, Germans, French Canadians, and perhaps even such peculiar people as Finns and Icelanders, among the settlers, and the Americans come from many different States. It is hard to establish any social bond in such a mixed population, yet one and all need social intercourse, as the thing most essential to pleasant living, after food, fuel, shelter, and clothing. An alarming amount of insanity occurs in the new prairie States among farmers and their wives. In proportion to their numbers, the Scandinavian settlers furnish the largest contingent to the asylums. The reason is not far to seek. These people came from cheery little farm villages. Life in the fatherland was hard and toilsome, but it was not lonesome. Think

for a moment how great the change must be from the white-walled, red-roofed village on a Norway fiord, with its church and schoolhouse, its fishing-boats on the blue inlet, and its green mountain walls towering aloft to snow fields, to an isolated cabin on a Dakota prairie, and say if it is any wonder that so many Scandinavians lose their mental balance.

There is but one remedy for the dreariness of farm life on the prairies: the isolated farmhouse must be abandoned, and the people must draw together in villages. The peasants of the Russian steppes did this centuries ago, and so did the dwellers on the great Danubian plain. In the older parts of our prairie States, in western Minnesota, eastern Nebraska and Kansas, and the eastern parts of North and South Dakota, titles to homestead claims are now nearly all perfected by the required five years' occupancy of the land. Thus, there is no longer a necessity that the farmers should live upon the particular tracts which they cultivate. They might go out with their teams to till the fields, and return at evening to village homes. It would be entirely feasible to redivide the land in regions where it is all of nearly uniform fertility and value. Let us suppose that the owners of sixteen quarter-section farms, lying in a body and forming four full sections, should agree to remove their homes to the centre of the tract, and run new dividing lines radiating to the outer boundaries. Each settler would still have 160 acres, and no one would live more than a mile from the remotest limit of his farm. The nearer fields could be used for stock, and the distant ones for grain. The homes of the sixteen families would surround a village green, where the schoolhouse would stand. This could be used for church services on Sunday, and for various social purposes on week-day evenings. Such a nucleus of population would, however, soon possess a church in common with other farmers in the neighbor-

hood who might still cling to the old mode of isolated living, and there would probably be a store and a post office. An active social life would soon be developed in such a community. The school would go on winters as well as summers. Friendly attachments would be formed, and mutual helpfulness in farm and household work would soon develop into a habit. There would be nursing in illness, and consolation for those mourning for their dead. If the plains people were thus brought together into hamlets, some home industries might be established that would add to family incomes, or at least save outlay. The economic weakness of farming in the North is the enforced idleness of the farmer and his work animals during the long winter. After threshing and fall ploughing are finished there is nothing to do but to feed the stock. Four or five months are unproductive, and all this time the people and the animals are consuming the fruits of the working season. Even the women are not fully occupied in the care of their little houses and the cooking of the simple meals; for the stockings are no longer knit at home, there is no hum of the spinning-wheel, and the clothing is bought ready-made at the stores. If it were possible to restore to the farm some of the minor handicrafts that were carried on in the country thirty or forty years ago, there would be great gain in comfort, intelligence, and contentment. Now and then, while traveling over the Dakota prairies, I hear of a family that sends to market some kind of delicate cheese, or makes sausages of superior quality that find ready sale in the neighboring towns, or preserves small fruits. These little industries might be much extended if the farmers lived in communities, where extra labor could be had when needed, and where there would be mental attrition to wear off the rust of the winter's indolence and stimulate effort on new lines.

The early French colonists who set-

tled along the shores of the Red River of the North, in Manitoba, divided the land into long, narrow strips running back from the river banks, and thus formed a continuous village many miles long. In this they followed the example of their ancestors who first occupied the shores of the St. Lawrence. It was adherence to this custom, and resistance to the division of the land into checker-board squares, that brought on the rebellion of Riel and his half-breeds on the Saskatchewan. The Mennonites, who occupy the western side of the Red River just north of the American boundary, live in villages. With the exception of a few peculiar religious communities in Iowa and Kansas, I know of no other instances where farmers have established their homes in compact settlements. In all our prairie towns, however, one finds in winter many farmers' families who have left their houses and stock to the care of hired men, and are living in rooms over stores, or in parts of dwellings rented for temporary occupancy, in order to give their children opportunity for education and to escape the dreary monotony of isolation. The gregarious instinct thus asserts itself, in spite of habit, and of the inherited American idea that a farmer must live upon the land he tills, and must have no near neighbors. This habit will be hard to break, but I believe it must yield some time to the evident advantages of closer association. I have known instances, however, where efforts at more neighborly ways of living have been made on a small scale, and have failed. In the early settlement of Dakota, it sometimes happened that four families, taking each a quarter-section homestead, built their temporary dwellings on the adjacent corners, so as to be near together; but a few years later, when they were able to put up better buildings, they removed to the opposite sides of their claims, giving as a reason that their chickens got mixed up with their neighbors' fowls. In

these instances, I should add, the people were Americans. There is a crusty individuality about the average American farmer, the inheritance of generations of isolated living, that does not take kindly to the familiarities of close association.

I am aware that nothing changes so slowly as the customs of a people. It will take a long time to modify the settled American habit of isolated farmsteads. If it is ever changed, the new system will have to be introduced near the top of the rural social scale, and work down gradually to the masses. A group of farmers of superior intelligence and of rather more than average means must set an example and establish a model farm village; or perhaps this could be done by the owner of one of the so-called bonanza farms, who might subdivide four sections of his land, as I have described, and invite purchasers to build their homes around a central village green; or, still better, he might himself put up the farmhouses and barns, and then offer the farms for sale. The experiment would be widely discussed by the newspapers, and this extensive free advertising could hardly fail to attract as purchasers a class of people with faith in the idea, and possessed of such a sociable, neighborly disposition as would open the way to har-

monious living and to considerable practical coöperation in field work and the care of animals. One successful community would soon lead to the formation of others, and the new system would steadily spread.

The plains of the West extend from the Gulf of Mexico to the valley of the Saskatchewan in the British territory. A belt about three hundred miles wide on the eastern side of this vast region receives sufficient rainfall for farming. This belt is the granary of the continent, and even with its present sparse settlement it produces an enormous yearly surplus of wheat and corn. Its cultivators have thus far been engaged in a hard struggle to establish themselves on the soil, procure the necessities of existence, and pay off their mortgages. They are getting ahead year by year, and in the older settled districts good houses are taking the places of the pioneer shanties, and the towns show thrift and progress. Before long these prairie people will begin to grapple with the problems of a higher civilization. Then it will be found, I believe, that the first great step in advance in the direction of more comfortable living, and of intellectual development and rational social enjoyment, is the abandonment of the lonesome farmhouse, and the establishment of the farm village.

E. V. Smalley.

THE MORAL REVIVAL IN FRANCE.

FRANCE has ever been in the dramatic situation of carrying the general ideas which become, at different times, common human property to their extreme conclusions. The intellectual crises through which it passes are thrown into such objective shape, every manifestation of the French spirit is so lucidly projected against the background of

things, that the home of classicism, of the Revolution, of Auguste Comte, of Saint-Simonism, is, as it were, a looking-glass, in which other nations, of a genius more relative and less impelled to generalization, may see and study the history of the ideas that mould them.

We of the western world are passing, at this moment, through a phase