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## TWO-ACRE ESTATES, OR VILLA FARMS.

THE HOMESTEADS OF THE FUTURE.

By DORA DE BLAQUIÈRE.

THERE are two weighty questions much debated at present, in every family where there are young people of both or either sex growing up, and needing some provision to be made for their future living and maintenance. If the family fortune be not enough to supply more than a certain amount of education, or a few hundreds of pounds for an outfit and settlement, the questions of "Where shall we send him? What shall we do with her?" become even more puzzling still. Formerly it was only the boys who had to be thought of, now the girls also claim their share of education; which, if not professional, must be one of an advanced and excellent kind, or they cannot expect to compete with their fellows in life. Every girl does not want to be a doctor, and the profession of a nurse is much overstocked; the Civil Service will not provide for every one; and though music and the arts take some, perhaps, off our hands, we are still confronted with the question, for boys as well as girls: How can they make a living in the world of to-day? What a relief from these anxieties it would be were it once demonstrated without a doubt, that an opening



VIEW OF FOUNDER'S HOUSE, WITH OUTSIDE SEAT FOR WAYFARERS.

A book-cupboard is fixed above it, over the doors of which are these words—

*"A quiet resting-place—  
Refreshment for the mind."*



LARGE FRUIT AND VEGETABLE STOREHOUSE WITH DWELLING-ROOMS OVER.

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exists at our very doors, without any very great expenditure of money, which would answer equally for ourselves, if we needed it, or for our children; and that the training is one both inexpensive and not difficult to obtain.

Now one of the things which has been talked of for years, discussed from every possible point of view, and finally recommended by a Prime Minister of England, as a panacea for the distresses of the farmer, has been, what is known as *La petite culture*, the cultivation of fruit, flowers and vegetables, in fact, any and everything which can be grown in a small way by personal supervision and personal labour on a small amount of ground. Only a few weeks ago, as you have probably seen in the daily papers, at a Horticultural Show held in the grounds of Hawarden Castle, Mr. Gladstone spoke on this subject, and read a letter which had been sent to him by a farmer who had adopted his advice about small culture, and had found it useful and profitable too. I have cut out the letter because it is valuable as proving the case from the farmer's side. The letter is as follows:—

"DEAR SIR,—Some years ago, in a speech made at Hawarden, you suggested that, under

certain conditions, farmers should devote a part of their land to the culture of fruit and flowers. I am pleased to say that I took your advice, especially with regard to flowers, and that for the past three years, although I have largely increased my growth, I have received many more orders than I have been able to supply. You will, I am sure, be pleased to hear that I send cut flowers to dwellers in our large towns at a cost to them of something like fifty per cent. under what they formerly had to give; also that I am able to pay my workpeople twenty per cent. higher wages than they used to receive when the land was worked for purely agricultural purposes. In addition to this, I put by a very substantial profit for myself."

The side of the question that interests us at this moment is not the farmer's, however, but how and where we ourselves can manage to see and hear enough on the subject from people who have tried the experiment, to convince us that here, indeed, lies the land of promise for any one fond of out-of-door pursuits, and gifted with industry, perseverance, and a small amount of money. About eight years ago a London tradesman, Mr. R. K. Goodrich, thought he would like to go back to the country, make a home there, and live a more natural and probably a happier life. Being active and industrious, he also thought he would try to do a little profitable market-gardening and fruit-growing; so he got hold of a bit of land at Methwold, two and a half miles from Stoke Ferry Station on the Great Eastern Railway, and built a house and set to work; and then so prospered, that he told his story to several interested listeners, and soon found many who wished to do as he had done; and so arose the Methwold Fruit Farm Colony, a co-operative community, numbering at present about fifty settlers who own in all about one hundred and sixty acres in plots of from one to ten acres each. Field was added to field, beginning with two acres, then ten acres, then successively ten, thirteen and a half, two, nineteen, forty-two, thirty, and twenty-eight. None of the settlers would have embarked on the work of fruit farming or any other form of *petite culture* in an isolated situation, and it is probable they would have failed in it if they had; while failure in a colony, Mr. Goodrich thinks, is impossible. Some people, of course, may discover their *unfitness* for the new life, and may leave it; but not if they be educated and personally fitted for it.

All sorts and conditions of men and women are found amongst the settlers; all of them having left the city in search of a healthier and better life. Everyone is perfectly free, and yet it is practically a co-operative community. Each settler buys what land he likes and does what he likes with it; and at the base of the whole thing lies, I think, the English love for a freehold, and freedom with it. The land costs £30 an acre, and I was told

that there is a scheme in consideration whereby a person can buy even a foot of land at a time just as he is able to earn the money, a kind of penny in the slot scheme applied to land!

The colony, as at present working-out, is on the lines of freeholding by small capitalists; which means, people who have either saved or owned sums from £250 to £500. For the first-named sum you can purchase two acres of ground, plant and stock it, and build a good and pretty house, which means a rent of about £10 or so. What has been done at Methwold could be done in a hundred other places; and here is an opening for our boys as well as our girls.

With 1,200,000,000 eggs being laid all over Europe, as Mr. Gladstone says, it would be a very good thing if six hundred millions of them could be laid in England. The same history of foreign importation is told of butter, of apples, and of everything eatable that we consume. This latter is a crop so extremely well suited to all parts of this country, and it was so celebrated for the best kinds of apples, that it seems as if we ought to do more for

market. There are about a hundred agricultural labourers in the parish of Methwold; and the colony not only works itself, but employs much labour; indeed, it is said that if the whole parish were worked in the same mode of intense cultivation, a thousand labourers would be wanted; and what prosperity this would mean for all England it is not difficult to foresee.

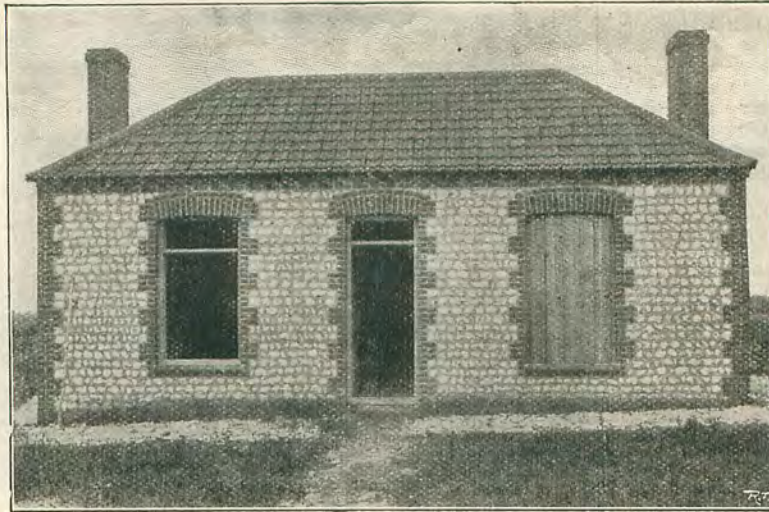
And now I feel sure that the question is coming, Can a living be made upon small estates? and this is exactly the question Mr. Goodrich thinks is answered at the Fruit Farm Colony. When brains are united with the virtues of the soil, and clever and enlightened men and women with scientific knowledge set to work, they have, and will produce marvellous results from small areas. Beside covering their own tables with food, they have in addition grown as much as possible for sale. New ideas are constantly being taken up, and lately osier beds have been planted, and workshops for many village industries are being erected, such as the making of jams, grinding and storing peat, for preserving apples, potatoes, onions, etc., and the colony is even attempting to make its own homespun cloth, and, in addition, will undertake tailoring.

An Institute and Reading-room is proposed; the institute being for technical instruction and lectures on all subjects connected with the objects of the colony, to which the library and reading-room will be attached. The lecturer of the Norfolk County Council gave lectures on Horticulture last winter, and this summer has been appointed to give object lessons to the residents in the colony; nor must I forget to mention, that the National Thrift Society have arranged to open, if they have not already done so, a Thrift Industrial Home for the education of boys. In this school, which has a staff of practical instructors, all

branches of work will be taught, so that two or three years will suffice to teach all that is requisite for the management of a small combination farm, with a fair prospect for the future. The entire cost for one year's training is to be £25, including board and lodging. After this it is expected that a boy will be able to earn his own living in the colony.

Girls have a provision also made for their education in Horticulture, besides the lectures at Methwold and other places; in the college at Swanley in Kent; bee-keeping, poultry-farming, dairy-work, etc., can be learnt; terms inclusive about £70 per annum. There is also a course at the Crystal Palace School of Science.

Methwold has already started its small newspaper, called *The Methwold Express and Village Industries Gazette*; and here one may read the opinions and ideas of the colonists. I find that there are lady farmers as well as gentlemen, and that many more are expected to take up their residence on their estates of two acres.



Cottage of limestone and bricks, with a well of good water, two hundred fruit trees: planted on two acres, worth about £250, which can be paid in instalments.

ourselves. But alas! the English farmer who owns an orchard is quite the exception; and if there be one, the apples grow just as they will; little science is expended on the trees to ensure a good crop, and few farmers understand even the A B C of fruit-growing.

And now I must tell you what the Methwold colonists do to make a living. They grow vegetables, fruit and flowers; they keep cows, pigs, poultry and bees. They make butter and jam, sell eggs, and supply beehives, poultry-houses and rustic furniture, and send to all parts nice little parcels of honey, jams, apples and vegetables priced from 5s. to 10s. carriage paid. Here the co-operative system comes in, for in making up these parcels, many settlers contribute, for one has an article which another has not; and here is the advantage of collective small proprietorships. There is now quite a large trade done between Methwold and London, and hundreds of packages are sent up weekly. In fact the colony is unable to supply its many customers, and it is hunting the surrounding country for produce that could not find a

