

PICTURESQUE ASPECTS OF FARM LIFE IN NEW YORK.



GATHERING BUTTER.

MANY of the early settlers of New York were from New England, Connecticut perhaps sending out the most; but the state

early had one element introduced into its rural and farm life not found farther East, namely the Holland Dutch. These gave

features more or less picturesque to the country that are not observable in New England. The Dutch took root at various points along the Hudson, and about Albany and in the Mohawk valley, and remnants of their rural and domestic architecture may still be seen in these sections of the state. A Dutch barn became proverbial. "As broad as a Dutch barn" was a phrase that when applied to the person of a man or woman, left room for little more to be said. The main feature of these barns was their enormous expansion of roof. It was a comfort to look at them, they suggested such shelter and protection. The eaves were very low and the ridge-pole very high. Long rafters and short posts gave them a quaint, short-waisted, grandmotherly look. They were nearly square and stood very broad upon the ground. Their form was doubtless suggested by the damper climate of the Old World, where the grain and hay, instead of being packed in deep solid mows, used to be spread upon poles and exposed to the currents of air under the roof. Surface and not cubic capacity is more important in these matters in Holland than in this country. Our farmers have found that in a climate where there is so much weather as with us the less roof you have the better. Roofs will leak, and cured hay will keep sweet in a mow of any depth and size in our dry atmosphere.

The Dutch barn was the most picturesque barn that has been built, especially when thatched with straw, as they nearly all were, and forming one side of an inclosure of lower roofs or sheds also of straw, beneath which the cattle took refuge from the winter storms. Its immense, unpainted gable, cut with holes for the swallows, was like a section of a respectable sized hill and its roof like its slope. Its great doors always had a hood projecting over them, and the doors themselves were divided horizontally into upper and lower halves; the upper halves very frequently being left open, through which you caught a glimpse of the mows of hay or the twinkle of flails when the grain was being threshed.

The old Dutch farm-houses, too, were always pleasing to look upon. They were low, often made of stone, with deep window jambs and great family fire-places. The outside door, like that of the barn, was always divided into upper and lower halves. When the weather permitted the upper half could stand open, giving light and air without the cold draught over the floor where the

children were playing, that our wide-swung doors admit. This feature of the Dutch house and barn certainly merits preservation in our modern buildings.

The large, unpainted timber barns that succeeded the first Yankee settlers' log stables were also picturesque, especially when a lean-to for the cow-stable was added and the roof carried down with a long sweep over it also; or when the barn was flanked by an open shed with a hay-loft above it, where the hens cackled and hid their nests, and from the open window of which the hay was always hanging.

Then the great timbers of these barns and the Dutch barn, hewn from maple or birch or oak trees from the primitive woods, and put in place by the combined strength of all the brawny arms in the neighborhood, when the barn was raised,—timbers strong enough and heavy enough for docks and quays, and that have absorbed the odors of the hay and grain until they look ripe and mellow and full of the pleasing sentiment of the great, sturdy, bountiful interior! The "big beam" has become smooth and polished from the hay that has been pitched over it and the sweaty, sturdy forms that have crossed it. One feels that he would like furniture—a chair, or a table, or a writing-desk, a bedstead, or a wainscoting made from these long-seasoned, long-tried, richly toned timbers of the old barn. But the smart-painted, natty barn that follows the humbler structure, with its glazed windows, its ornamented ventilator and gilded weather vane—who cares to contemplate it? The wise human eye loves modesty and humility, loves plain, simple structures, loves the unpainted barn that took no thought of itself, or the dwelling that looks inward and not outward; is offended when the farm buildings get above their business and aspire to be something on their own account, suggesting not cattle and crops and plain living, but the vanities of the town and the pride of dress and equipage.

Indeed, the picturesque in human affairs and occupations is always born of love and humility, as it is in art or literature; and it quickly takes to itself wings and flies away at the advent of pride, or any selfish or unworthy motive. The more directly the farm savors of the farmer, the more the fields and buildings are redolent of human care and toil, without any thought of the passer-by—the more we delight in the contemplation of it.

It is unquestionably true that farm life and farm scenes in this country are less pictur-

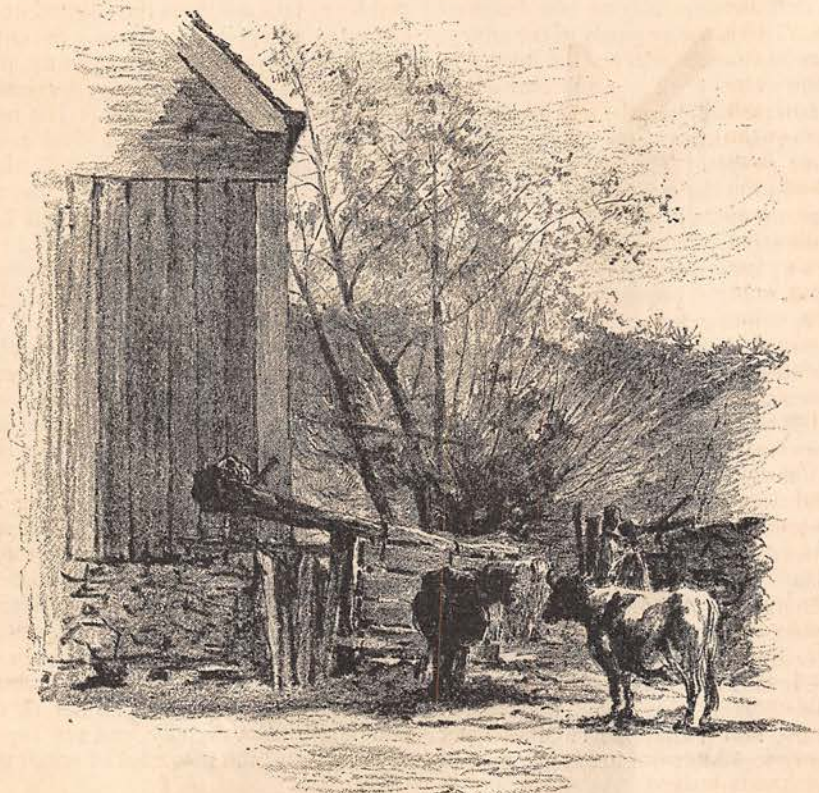
esque than they were fifty or one hundred years ago. This is owing partly to the advent of machinery, which enables the farmer to do so much of his work by proxy and hence removes him further from the soil, and partly to the growing distaste for the occupation among our people. The old settlers—our fathers and grandfathers—loved the farm, and had no thoughts above it; but the later generations are looking to the town and its fashions, and only waiting for a chance to flee thither. Then pioneer life is always more or less picturesque; there is no room for vain and foolish thoughts; it is a hard battle, and the people have no time to think about appearances. When my grandfather and grandmother came into the country where they reared their family and passed their days, they cut a road through the woods and brought all their worldly gear on a sled drawn by a yoke of oxen. Their neighbors helped them build a house of logs, with a roof of black ash bark and a floor of hewn white ash plank. A great stone chimney and fire-place—the mortar of red clay—gave light and warmth, and cooked the meat and baked the bread, when there was any to cook or to bake. Here they lived and reared their family, and found life sweet. Their unworthy descendant, yielding to the inher-

ited love of the soil, flees the city and its artificial ways, and gets some acres in the country, where he proposes to engage in the pursuit supposed to be free to every American citizen—the pursuit of happiness. The humble old farm-house is discarded, and a smart, modern country-house put up. Walks and roads are made and graveled; trees and hedges are planted; the rustic old barn is combed and barbered and tailored; and, after it is all fixed, the uneasy proprietor stands off and looks, and calculates by how much he has missed the picturesque, at which he aimed. Our new houses undoubtedly have greater comforts and conveniences than the old, and if we could keep our pride and vanity in abeyance and forget that all the world is looking on, they might have beauty also.

The man that forgets himself, he is the man we like, and the dwelling that forgets itself in its purpose to shelter and protect its inmates and make them feel at home in it, is the dwelling that fills the eye. When you see one of the great cathedrals, you know that it was not pride that animated these builders, but fear and worship; but when you see the house of the rich farmer or of the millionaire from the city, you see the pride of money and the insolence of social power.



Strawberry pickers



MILKING-TIME.

Machinery, I say, has taken away some of the picturesque features of farm life. How much soever we may admire machinery and the faculty of mechanical invention, there is no machine like a man; and the work done directly by his hands, the things made or fashioned by them, have a virtue and a quality that cannot be imparted by machinery. The line of mowers in the meadows, with the straight swaths behind them, are more picturesque than the "Clipper" or "Buck-eye" mower, with its team and driver. So are the flails of the threshers, chasing each other through the air, more pleasing to the eye and the ear than the machine, with its uproar, its choking clouds of dust, and its general hurly-burly.

Sometimes the threshing was done in the open air, upon a broad rock, or a smooth, dry plat of green sward, and it is occasionally done there yet, especially the threshing of the buckwheat crop, by a farmer who has not a good barn floor, or who cannot afford to hire the machine. The flail makes a louder *thud* in the fields than you would imagine; and in the splendid October wea-

ther it is a pleasing spectacle to behold the gathering of the ruddy crop and three or four lithe figures beating out the grain with their flail in some sheltered nook, or some grassy lane lined with cedars. When there are three flails beating together it makes lively music; and when there are four they follow each other so fast that it is a continuous roll of sound, and it requires a very steady stroke not to hit or get hit by the others. There is just room and time to get your blow in, and that is all. When one flail is upon the straw, another has just left it, another is half-way down, and the fourth is high and straight in the air. It is like a swiftly revolving wheel that delivers four blows at each revolution. Threshing, like mowing, goes much easier in company than when alone; yet many a farmer or laborer spends nearly all the late fall and winter days shut in the barn, pounding doggedly upon the endless sheaves of oats and rye.

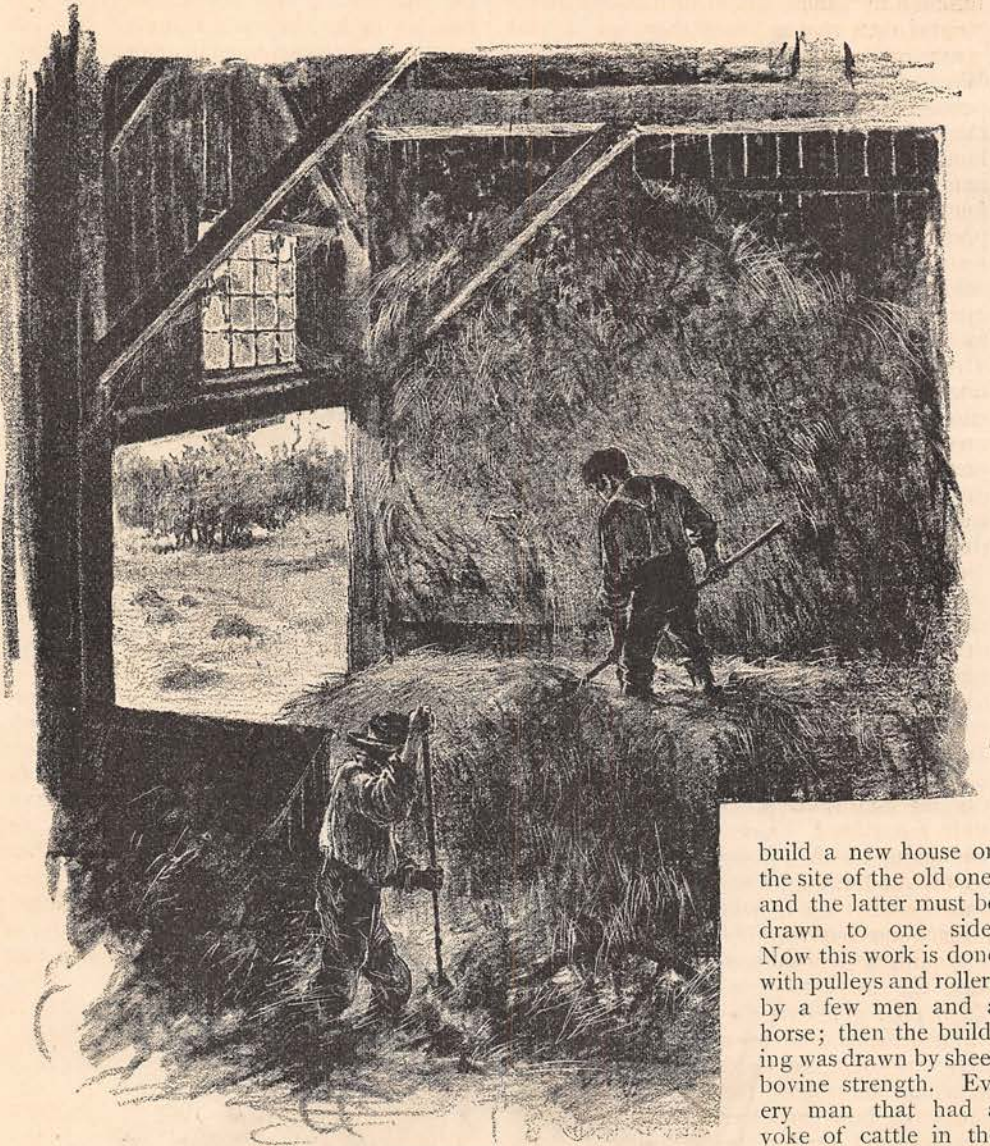
When the farmers made "bees," as they did a generation or two ago much more than they do now, a picturesque element was added. There was the stone bee, the

husking bee, the "raising," the "moving," etc. When the carpenters had got the timbers of the house or barn ready, and the foundation was prepared, then the neighbors for miles about were invited to come to the "raisin'". The afternoon was the time chosen. The forenoon was occupied by the carpenter and farm hands, in putting the sills and "sleepers" in place ("sleepers," what a good name for those rude hewn timbers that lie under the floor in the darkness and silence!). When the hands arrived the great beams and posts and joists and braces, were carried to their place on the platform, and the first "bent," as it was called was put together and pinned by oak pins that the boys brought. Then pike poles are distributed, the men, fifteen or twenty of them, arranged in a line abreast of the bent; the boss carpenter steadies and guides the corner post and gives the word of command, "Take holt, boys!" "Now, set her up!" "Up with her!" "Up she goes!" When it gets shoulder high it becomes heavy, and there is a pause. The pikes are brought into requisition, every man gets a good hold and braces himself, and waits for the words, "All together now;" shouts the captain, "Heave her up!" "He-o-he!" (heave-all,—heave), "he-o-he," at the top of his voice, every man doing his best. Slowly the great timbers go up; louder grows the word of command, till the bent is up.



UPPER DOOR OF A SIDE-HILL BARN.

Then it is plumed and stay-lathed, and another is put together and raised in the same way till they are all up. Then comes the putting on the great plates—timbers that run lengthwise of the building and match the sills below. Then, if there is time, the putting up of the rafters. In every neighborhood there was always some man who was especially useful at "raisin's." He was bold and strong and quick. He helped guide and superintend the work. He was the



PITCHING OFF A LOAD OF HAY

first one up on the bent, catching a pin or a brace and putting it in place. He walked the lofty and perilous plate, with the great beetle in hand; put the pins in the holes, and swinging the heavy instrument through the air, drove the pins home. He was as much at home up there as a squirrel.

Now that balloon frames are mainly used for houses, and lighter sawed timbers for barns, the old-fashioned raising is rarely witnessed.

Then the moving was an event, too. A farmer had a barn to move, or wanted to

build a new house on the site of the old one, and the latter must be drawn to one side. Now this work is done with pulleys and rollers by a few men and a horse; then the building was drawn by sheer bovine strength. Every man that had a yoke of cattle in the country round about

was invited to assist. The barn or house was pried up and great runners, cut in the woods, placed under it, and under the runners were placed skids. To these runners it was securely chained and pinned; then the cattle—stags, steers and oxen, in two long lines, one at each runner—were hitched fast, and while men and boys aided with great levers, the word to go was given. Slowly the two lines of bulky cattle straightened and settled into their bows; the big chains that wrapt the runners tightened, a dozen or more “gads” were flourished, a dozen or

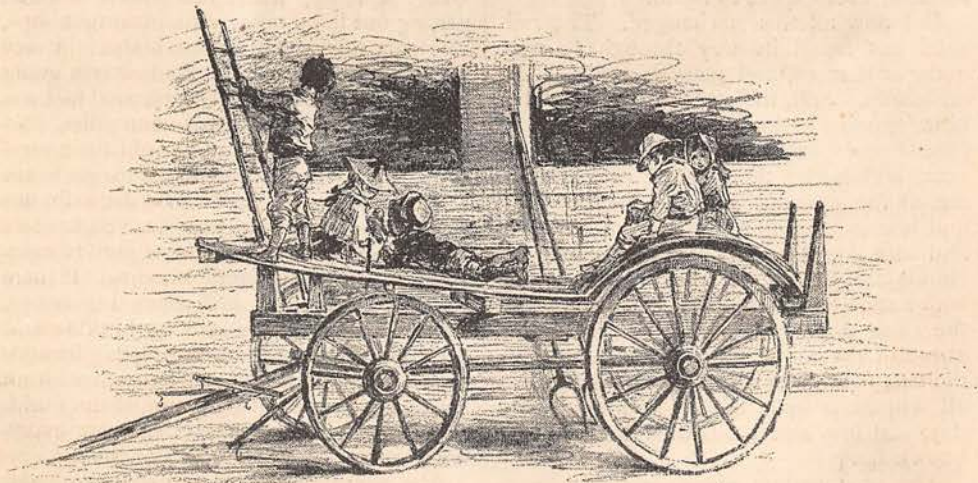
more lusty throats urged their teams at the top of their voices, when there was a creak or a groan as the building stirred. Then the drivers redoubled their efforts; there was a perfect Babel of discordant sounds; the oxen bent to the work, their eyes bulged, their nostrils distended; the lookers-on cheered and away went the old house or barn as nimbly as a boy on a hand-sled. Not always, however; sometimes the chains would break, or one runner strike a rock, or bury itself in the earth. There were generally enough mishaps or delays to make it interesting.

In the section of the state of which I write flax used to be grown, and cloth for shirts and trowsers, and towels and sheets, etc., woven from it. It was no laughing matter for the farm-boy to break in his shirt or trowsers those days. The hair shirts in which the old monks used to mortify the flesh could not have been much before them in this mortifying particular. But after the bits of shives and sticks were subdued and the knots humbled by use and the wash-board, they were good garments. If you lost your hold in a tree and your shirt caught on a knot or limb, it would save you.

But when has any one seen a crackle, or a swingling-knife, or a hetchel, or a distaff, and where can one get some tow for strings or for gun-wadding, or some swingling-tow for a bonfire? The quill-wheel, and the spinning-wheel, and the loom, are heard no more among us. The last I knew of a certain hetchel it was nailed up behind the old sheep that did the churning, and when he was disposed to shirk or hang back and stop

the machine, it was always ready to spur him up in no uncertain manner. The old loom became a hen-roost in an out-building; and the crackle upon which the flax was broken, where, oh, where is it?

When the produce of the farm was taken a long distance to market—that was an event too. The carrying away of the butter in the fall, for instance, to the river, a journey that occupied both ways four days. Then the family marketing was done in a few groceries. Some cloth, new caps and boots for the boys, and a dress, or a shawl, or a cloak for the girls were brought back, besides news and adventure, strange rumors of the distant town. The farmer was days in getting ready to start, food was prepared and put in a box to stand him on the journey, and oats put up for the horses. The butter was loaded up overnight, and in the cold November morning, long before it was light, he was up and off. I can hear his wagon yet, its slow rattle over the frozen ground diminishing in the distance. On the fourth day toward night all grew expectant of his return, but it was usually dark before his wagon was heard coming down the hill, or his voice summoning a light from before the door. When the boys got big enough, one after the other accompanied him each year, until all had made the famous journey and seen the great river and the steamboats, and the thousand and one marvels of the far away town. When it came my turn to go, I was in a great state of excitement for a week beforehand, for fear my clothes would not be ready, or else that it would be too cold, or else that



THE HAY-WAGON AFTER THE HARVEST.

the world would come to an end before the time fixed for starting. The day previous I roamed the woods in quest of game to supply my bill of fare on the way, and was

by some local industry of one kind or another. In many of the high cold counties in the eastern center of the state, this ruling industry is hop-growing; in the western it



DRIVING SHEEP TO BE WASHED.

lucky enough to shoot a partridge and an owl, though the latter I did not take. Perched high on a "spring-board," I made the journey and saw more sights and wonders than I have ever seen on a journey since, or ever expect to again.

But now all this is changed. The railroad has found its way through or near every settlement, and marvels and wonders are cheap. Still, the essential charm of the farm remains and always will remain; the care of crops, and of cattle, and of orchards, bees, and fowls; the clearing and improving of the ground; the building of barns and houses; the direct contact with the soil, and with the elements; the watching of the clouds and of the weather; the privacies with nature, with bird, beast and plant; and the close acquaintance with the heart and virtue of the world. The farmer should be the true naturalist; the book in which it is all written is open before him night and day, and how sweet and wholesome all his knowledge is!

The predominant feature of farm life in New York as in other states, is always given

is grain and fruit-growing; in sections along the Hudson, it is small-fruit growing, as berries, currants, grapes; in other counties it is milk and butter; in others quarrying flagging-stone. I recently visited a section of Ulster County, where everybody seemed getting out hoop-poles and making hoops. The only talk was of hoops, hoops! Every team that went by had a load or was going for a load of hoops. The principal fuel was hoop-shavings or discarded hoop-poles. No man had any money until he sold his hoops. When a farmer went to town to get some grains, or a pair of boots, or a dress for his wife, he took a load of hoops. People stole hoops and poached for hoops, and bought, and sold, and speculated in hoops. If there was a corner it was in hoops; big hoops, little hoops, hoops for kegs, and firkins, and barrels, and hogsheads, and pipes; hickory hoops, birch hoops, ash hoops, chestnut hoops, hoops enough to go around the world. Another place it was shingle, shingle; everybody was shaving hemlock shingle.

The hop industry is an important one, and has its picturesque side. One day in

the train I saw a large number of brown country lads and lasses, with their satchels in their hands and their Sunday clothes on, merry and frolicsome as if bound for a picnic. I found they were going to the hop-growing region, about forty miles distant, to pick hops. And a pleasant excursion they must have made of it, gathering the fragrant hops and carrying them in baskets to the drying-house,—with now and then a “hop-spre” at night.

In places along the Hudson there is a similar movement of the younger population when the berry season commences. Little and big pick berries, the nimble fingers of the girls always winning in this race. It is the engrossing interest. The school stops,

just in time to see her hauling in her planks or gliding from the dock; or the captain may signal to the engineer to wait a moment, or back a little, when the crates of berries are tossed aboard over the rail and caught by the impatient “hands.” It is usually the man who lives close by that is left.

In most of the eastern counties of the State the interest and profit of the farm revolve about the cow. The dairy is the one great matter,—for milk, when milk can be shipped to the New York market, and for butter when it cannot. Great barns and stables and milking-sheds, and immense meadows and cattle on a thousand hills, are the prominent agricultural features of these sections of the country. Good grass and



TWILIGHT IN THE FIELDS.

and both teacher and pupils are in the berry patch. The mother brings her baby and sets it under a bush or tree, while she fills her carries of cups or baskets near by. The berries cannot wait, and the farmer neglects his hay and grain, and the culture of his corn, to get his berries off in time. When the day's picking is done, and the berries are packed ready for shipment, there come the hurry and excitement of getting them to the boat. Sometimes the landing is several miles distant; the pickers have been kept going to the last moment, leaving barely time to reach the boat if all goes well. Somebody, however, is always late and comes whipping up his horses as he hears the warning whistle of the steamer, and is

good water are the two indispensables to successful dairying. And the two generally go together. Where there are plenty of copious cold springs there is no dearth of grass. When the cattle are compelled to browse upon weeds and various wild growths, the milk and butter will betray it in the flavor. Tender, juicy grass, the ruddy blossoming clover, or the fragrant, well-cured hay, make the delicious milk and the sweet butter. Then there is a charm about a natural pastoral country that belongs to no other. Go through Orange county in May and see the vivid emerald of the smooth fields and hills. It is a new experience of the beauty and effectiveness of simple grass. And this grass has rare virtues, too, and imparts a

flavor to the milk and butter that has made them famous.

Along all the sources of the Delaware the land flows with milk, if not with honey. The grass is excellent, except in times of protracted drought, and then the browsings in the beech and birch woods are good substitute. Butter is the staple product. Every housewife is or wants to be a famous butter maker, and Delaware county butter rivals Orange in market. It is a high, cool grazing country. The farms lie tilted up against the sides of the mountain or lapping over the hills, striped or checked with stone wall, and presenting to the eye long stretches of pasture and meadow land, alternating with plowed fields and patches of waving grain. Few of their features are picturesque; they are bare, broad and simple. The farm-house gets itself a coat of white paint, and green blinds to the windows, and the barn and wagon-house a coat of red paint with white trimmings, as soon as possible. A penstock flows by the door-way, rows of tin pans sun themselves in the yard, and the great wheel of the churning machine flanks the milk-house, or rattles behind it. The winters are severe, the snow deep. The principal fuel is still wood—beech, birch and maple. It is hauled off the mountain, in great logs when the first November or December snows come, and cut up and piled in the wood-houses and under a shed. Here the ax still rules the winter, and it may be heard all day and every day upon the wood-pile, or echoing through the frost-bound wood, the coat of the chopper hanging to a limb and his white chips strewing the snow.

Many cattle need much hay; hence in dairy sections haying is the period of "storm and stress" in the farmer's year. To get the hay in, in good condition, and before the grass gets too ripe, is a great matter. All the energies and resources of the farm are bent to this purpose. It is a thirty or forty day war, in which the farmer and his "hands" are pitted against the heat and the rain, and the legions of timothy and clover. Every thing about it has the urge, the hurry, the excitement of a battle. Outside help is procured; men flock in from adjoining counties, where the ruling industry is something else, and is less imperative; coopers, blacksmiths, and laborers of various kinds drop their tools, and take down their scythes and go in quest of a job in haying. Every man is expected to pitch his endeavors in a little higher key than at any other

kind of work. The wages are extra, and the work must correspond. The men are in the meadow by half-past four, or five, in the morning and mow an hour or two before breakfast. A good mower is proud of his skill. He does not "lop in," and his "pointing out" is perfect, and you can hardly see the ribs of his swath. He stands up to his grass and strikes level and sure. He will turn a double down through the stoutest grass, and when the hay is raked away you will not find a spear left standing. The Americans are—or were—the best mowers. A foreigner could never quite give the masterly touch. The hayfield has its code. One man must not take another's swath unless he expects to be crowded. Each expects to take his turn leading the band. The scythe may be so whet as to ring out a saucy challenge to the rest. It is not good manners to mow up too close to your neighbor, unless you are trying to keep out of the way of the man behind you. Many a race has been brought on by some one being a little indiscreet in this respect. Two men may mow all day together under the impression that each is trying to put the other through. The one that leads strikes out briskly, and the other, not to be out-done, follows close. Thus the blood of each is soon up; a little heat begets more heat, and it is fairly a race before long. It is a great ignominy to be mowed out of your swath. Hay gathering is clean, manly work all through. Young fellows work in haying who do not do another stroke on the farm the whole year. It is a gymnasium in the meadows and under the summer sky. How full of pictures, too!—the smooth slopes dotted with cocks with lengthening shadows; the great, broad-backed, soft-cheeked loads, moving along the lanes and brushing under the trees; the unfinished stack with forkfuls of hay being handed up its sides to the builder, and when finished the shape of a great pear, with a stalk in the top for the stem. May be in the fall and winter the calves and yearlings will hover around it and gnaw its base until it overhangs them and shelters them from the storm. Or the farmer will "fodder" his cows there,—one of the most picturesque scenes to be witnessed on the farm—twenty or thirty or forty milchers filing along toward the stack in the field, or clustered about it, waiting the promised bite. In great, green flakes the hay is rolled off, and distributed about in small heaps upon the unspotted snow. After the cattle have eaten, the birds—



Old barn with cattle sheds

snow-buntings and red-polls—come and pick up the crumbs, the seeds of the grasses and weeds. At night the fox and the owl come for mice.

What a beautiful path the cows make through the snow to the stack, or to the spring under the hill!—always more or less wayward, but uniform and firm, and carved and indented by a multitude of rounded hoofs.

In fact, the cow is the true path-finder and path-maker. She has the leisurely, deliberate movement that ensures an easy and a safe way. Follow her trail through the woods and you have the best if not the shortest course. How she beats down the brush and briars and wears away even the roots of the trees! A herd of cows left to themselves fall naturally into single file, and a hundred or more hoofs are not long in smoothing and compacting almost any surface.

Indeed, all the ways and doings of cattle are pleasant to look upon, whether grazing in the pasture, or browsing in the woods, or ruminating under the trees, or feeding in the stall, or reposing upon the knolls. There is virtue in the cow; she is full of goodness; a wholesome odor exhales from her; the whole landscape looks out of her soft eyes; the quality and the aroma of miles of meadow and pasture lands are in her presence and products. I had rather have the care of cattle than be the keeper of the great seal of the nation. Where the cow is, there

is Arcadia; so far as her influence prevails there is contentment, humility and sweet, homely life.

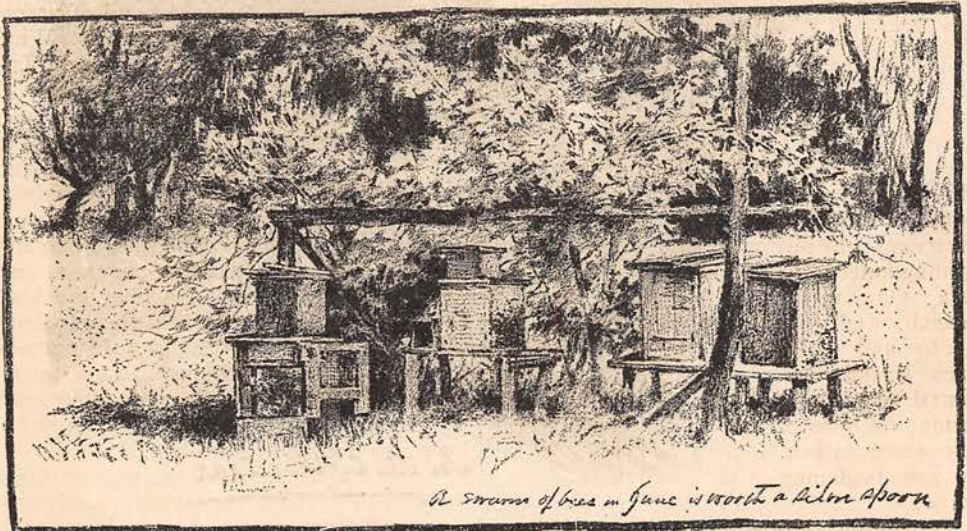
Blessed is he whose youth was passed upon the farm, and if it was a dairy farm his memories will be all the more fragrant. The driving of the cows to and from the pasture, every day and every season for years—how much of summer and of nature he got into him on these journeys! What rambles and excursions did this errand furnish the excuse for! The birds and birds' nests, the berries, the squirrels, the woodchucks, the beech woods with their treasures into which the cows loved so to wander and to browse, the fragrant winter-greens and a hundred nameless adventures all strung upon that brief journey of half a mile to and from the remote pastures. Sometimes one cow or two will be missing when the herd is brought home at night; then to hunt them up is another adventure. My grandfather went out one night to look up an absentee from the yard, when he heard something in the brush and out stepped a bear into the path before him.

Every Sunday morning the cows must be salted. The farm-boy takes a pail with three or four quarts of coarse salt and, followed by the eager herd, goes to the field and deposits the salt in handfuls upon smooth stones and rocks and upon clean places on the turf. If you want to know how good salt is, see a cow eat it. She

gives the true saline smack. How she dwells upon it and gnaws the sward and licks the stones where it has been deposited! The cow is the most delightful feeder among animals. It makes one's mouth water to see her eat pumpkins, and to see her at a pile of apples is distracting. How she sweeps off the delectable grass! The sound of her grazing is appetizing; the grass betrays all its sweetness and succulency in parting under her sickle.

The region of which I write abounds in sheep also. Sheep love high, cool, breezy lands. Their range is generally much above that of cattle. Their sharp noses will find picking where a cow would fare poorly indeed. Hence most farmers utilize their high, wild and mountain lands by keeping a small flock of sheep. But they are the outlaws of the farm and are seldom within bounds. They make many lively expeditions for the farm-boy—driving them out of mischief, hunting them up in the mountains, or salting them on the breezy hills. Then there is the annual sheep-washing in spring, when on a warm day in May or early June the whole herd is driven a mile or more to a suitable pool in the creek and one by one doused and washed and rinsed in the water. We used to wash below an old "grist mill," and it was a pleasing spectacle—the mill, the dam, the over-hang-

esque of them all, is sugar-making in the maple woods in spring. This is the first work of the season, and to the boys is more play than work. In the Old World, and in more simple and imaginative times, how such an occupation as this would have got into literature, and how many legends and associations would have clustered around it. It is woodsy, and savors of the trees; it is an encampment among the maples. Before the bud swells, before the grass springs, before the plow is started, comes the sugar harvest. It is the sequel of the bitter frost; a sap-run is the sweet good-bye of winter. It denotes a certain equipoise of the season; the heat of the day fully balances the frost of the night. In New York and New England the time of the sap hovers about the vernal equinox, beginning a week or ten days before, and continuing a week or ten days after. As the days and nights get equal, the heat and cold get equal, and the sap mounts. A day that brings the bees out of the hive will bring the sap out of the maple-tree. It is the fruit of the equal marriage of the sun and frost. When the frost is all out of the ground, and all the snow from its surface, the flow stops. The thermometer must not rise above 38° or 40° by day, or sink below 24° or 25° at night, with wind in the north-west; a relaxing south wind and the run is over for the present. Sugar



A swarm of bees in June is worth a silver spoon

ing rocks and trees, the round, deep pool and the huddled and frightened sheep.

One of the features of farm-life peculiar to this country, and one of the most pictur-

weather is crisp weather. How the tin buckets glisten in the gray woods; how the robins laugh; how the nut-hatches call; how lightly the thin blue smoke rises among



In the Cider-cellar

the trees. The squirrels are out of their dens; the migrating water-fowls are streaming northward; the sheep and cattle look wistfully toward the bare fields; the tide of the season, in fact, is just beginning to rise.

Sap-letting does not seem to be an exhaustive process to the trees, as the trees of a sugar-bush appear to be as thrifty and as long-lived as other trees. They come to have a maternal, large-waisted look from the wounds of the ax or the auger, and that is about all.

In my sugar-making days, the sap was carried to the boiling-place in pails by the aid of a neck-yoke and stored in hogsheads, and boiled or evaporated in immense kettles or caldrons set in huge stone arches; now the hogshead goes to the trees hauled upon

a sled by a team, and the sap is evaporated in broad, shallow, sheet-iron pans—a great saving of fuel and of labor.

Many a farmer sits up all night boiling his sap, when the run has been an extra good one, and a lonely vigil he has of it amid the silent trees, and beside his wild hearth. If he has a sap-house, as is now so common, he may make himself fairly comfortable, and, if a companion, he may have a good time or a glorious wake.

Maple-sugar in its perfection is rarely seen, perhaps never seen in the market. When made in large quantities and indifferently, it is dark and coarse; but when made in small quantities—that is, quickly from the first run of sap and properly treated—it has a wild delicacy of flavor that no other sweet can match. What you smell in freshly cut maple-wood, or taste in the blossom of the tree is in it. It is then, indeed, the distilled essence of the tree. Made into syrup, it is white and clear as clover-honey, and crystallized into sugar, it is pure as the wax. The way to attain this result is to evaporate the sap on the kitchen stove in tin pans or an enameled kettle; allow it to settle half a day or more, when reduced about twelve times; then clarify with milk or the white of an egg. The product is virgin syrup, or sugar worthy the table of the gods.

Perhaps the most heavy and laborious work of the farm in the section of the state of which I write, is fence-building. But it is not unproductive labor, as in the South or West, for the fence is of stone and the capacity of the soil for grass or grain is, of course, increased by its construction. It is killing two birds with one stone: a fence is had, the best in the world, while the available area of the field is enlarged. In fact, if there are ever sermons in stones, it is when they are built into a stone-wall,—turning your hindrances into helps, shielding your crops behind the obstacles to your husbandry, making the enemies of the plow stand guard over its products. This is the kind of farming worth imitating. A stone-wall with a good rock bottom will stand as long as a man lasts. Its only enemy is the frost, and it works so gently that it is not till after many years that its effect is perceptible. An old farmer will walk with you through his fields and say, "This wall I built at such and such a time, or the first year I came on the farm, or when I owned such and such a span of horses," indicating

a period thirty, forty, or fifty years back. "This other, we built the summer so and so worked for me," and he relates some incident, or mishap, or comical adventures that the memory calls up. Every line of fence has a history; the mark of his plow or his crow-bar is upon the stones; the sweat of his early manhood put them in place; in fact, the long black line covered with lichens and in places tottering to the fall, revives long-gone scenes and events in the life of the farm.

The time for fence-building is usually between seed-time and harvest, May and June; or in the fall after the crops are gathered. The work has its picturesque features,—the prying of rocks; supple forms climbing or swinging from the end of the great levers, or the blasting of the rocks with powder; the hauling of them into position with oxen or horses, or with both; the picking of the stone from the greensward; the bending, athletic form of the wall layers; the snug new fence creeping slowly up the hill or across the field absorbing the windrow of loose stone,—and when the work is done much ground reclaimed to the plow and the grass, and a strong barrier erected.

It is a common complaint that the farm and farm life are not appreciated by our people. We long for the more elegant pursuits, or the ways and fashions of the town. But the farmer has the most sane and natural occupation, and ought to find life sweeter, if less highly seasoned, than any other. He alone, strictly speaking, has a home. How can a man take root and thrive without land? He writes his history upon his field. How many ties, how many resources he has; his friendships with his cattle, his team, his dog, his trees, the satisfaction in his growing crops, in his improved fields; his intimacy with Nature, with bird and beast, and with the quickening elemental forces; his co-operations with the cloud, the sun, the seasons, heat, wind, rain, frost. Nothing will take the various social distempers which the city and artificial life breed out of a man like farming, like direct and loving contact with the soil. It draws out the poison. It humbles him, teaches him patience and reverence, and restores the proper tone to his system.

Cling to the farm, make much of it, put yourself into it, bestow your heart and your brain upon it, so that it shall savor of you and radiate your virtue after your day's work is done!