

## The Crisotretic Occupation

There is perhaps no occupation, however sordid and uninteresting it may appear, which does not number among those who follow it, some men who by their enthusiasms raise themselves from artisans to artists and bring to their prosaic calling the glamour of inspiration. There are other occupations which are in themselves so vital and interesting that the least inspired of mortals must feel himself stimulated, must feel his ambition awakened and his emulation stoked.

Agriculture is such a calling. When we turn our eyes to those misty beginnings which we call Prehistoric Times we see a strange dim figure moving in the shadows, this figure we have called Primitive Man. In those ages before history comes to our assistance Primitive Man had passed through the hunter stage of existence, passed, too, the stage when he moved from place to place with his flocks and herds; when he emerges into the spot-light of history it is as an agriculturist. The reason for this is not far to seek, for of these three occupations agriculture alone gave to his life that permanence and stability which would encourage the keeping of records.

What a memorial an imaginative world could erect to the genius who first visioned the possibility of preserving and sowing such wild grains as had heretofore been casually gathered and eaten

when and where they ripened. Man, hitherto a tolerated guest, taking thankfully what the earth gave him, became with this thought the master and, coming thus to possess the earth, opened the way for all the wonderful events which the centuries were to bring.

The oldest of all aristocracies is a landed aristocracy and in all ages men have responded to the proud consciousness of one's own vine and fig tree. So ancient is the lineage of agriculture, so aristocratic its antecedents, that all farmers must feel the deepest pride in their calling. The "patriarchs of the infant world" were farmers and the most desultory reading of literature, sacred or profane, will reveal how important has been the role of agriculture. The Bible abounds with similes drawn from farming, so does Latin literature, Horace and Propertius, and most important of all Virgil in his *Bucolics*. The Romans were, from earliest times, a typically agricultural people, Cicero puts into the mouth of Cato these words, "I come now to the pleasures of husbandry, in which I vastly delight. They are not interrupted by old age, and they seem to me pursuits in which a wise man's life should be spent. The earth does not rebel against authority; it never gives back but with reserve what it receives. The gains of husbandry are not what exclusively commends it. I am charmed with the nature and productive

violet of the soil. Can these old men be called unhappy who delight in the cultivation of the soil? In my opinion there can be no happier life, not only because the tillage of the earth is salutary to all, but from the pleasure of fields. The whole establishment of a good and assiduous husbandman is stored with wealth; it abounds in figs, in pears, in lambs, in poultry, in milk, in cheese, in honey. Nothing can be more profitable, nothing more beautiful than a well cultivated farm."

It is not from any historical standpoint only that farming is an occupation full of dignity and interest. No where else is a man brought so close to nature; in no other calling is his livelihood so directly dependent on natural processes, the farmer is in partnership with nature. We are all children of the earth; like Cincinnatus we perish if we are too far removed from it, and the closer our lives are to the earth, the purer and sweeter they will be. Science, the farmer must possess and does possess, tho' he does not give that name to his stock of nature lore, and in the life about him he finds the profoundest instructions in poetry, in philosophy, and in religion. From that <sup>time</sup> when at the end of a gold and red September day, the sharp pencil of the frost marks the end of summer, through the autumn days with their daylight warmth and their starlit chill, through the white purity of winter days and the shining splendor of winter nights,

through budding spring and blossoming summer to fruitful autumn again, his daily activities are set against a background of such beautiful and varied scenes that only the most apathetic could be unappreciative of their charm.

It is unfortunately true that many farmers fail to grasp the beauty and significance of their calling. To be a successful farmer from the standpoint of mental and spiritual as well as financial enrichment requires a rather special equipment. The farmer must have imagination for his ventures are planned not in terms of days and months but of seasons and years; he must have an inborn affection for all growing things whether tender corn plants, fat little pigs or awkward and lovable cobs; the more of a naturalist he is, the the more satisfaction he will find in his life, the more understanding he will have for the commonplace yet mysterious processes of life - ~~the beginning~~ ~~the development~~ and the fruition - with which he comes so closely into contact. ~~Nevertheless~~ ~~sure~~ that the ~~one~~ ~~who~~ possesses these attributes will appreciate beauty, too, even tho' he may not have the words to express his feeling.

The Iowa farmer has no lack of beauty in his environment; the prairie has not, to be sure, the striking contrasts of a mountainous country, but to those who learn to know it well its beauty is unsurpassed. It is a calm and placid loveliness, the land lies in great,

gradual swells, inevitably suggestive of the ocean, and on these gentle slopes are the four courses, white, with barns and granaries of red; behind them the soldierly files of planted trees, at either side fields of oats or wheat and the dark green ranks of the corn. There are clover fields, too, masses of reddish purple by day, and by night censers which fill the air with sweetest odors. Rarely now does one see a field of wild hay, a remnant of that flower strewn infinitude which was the prairie of the pioneer; above the lush green grass rise the airy networks of Queen Anne's Lace and the purple spikes of the shooting star, against its dark background gleam the red cups of the prairie lilies, the glowing masses of butterfly weed and in moister spots the stately white flowers of the crow-foot. There are meadows too, where fat cattle graze or lie in placidly hazy shade, and the landscape everywhere and all the creatures in it wear one air of friendliness, of peaceful content, of reasonable prosperity.

The land is not the less beautiful that it has yielded itself easily and generously to its conquerors, there is one beauty of nature in a wild, benevolent, awe-inspiring mood, of rocky precipices, leafing towers and impenetrable forests, and another of a kind, beneficent nature giving her possessions lavishly to her favorite children. The rich, thick black soil in whose making the bounty of a thousand summers has perished, and which still contains within itself their very heart of life needed only to

be stirred with the power to bring forth, "some thirty, some sixty, some an hundred fold."

No man who lives thus closely in contact with nature can be irreligious, he may never see the inside of a church; he may be ignorant of doctrine and innocent of dogma, he may give any name or none to that great First Cause, but he will recognize and revere it. His eyes are not blinded to the workings of the Master Mind in the pulsing life about him, <sup>his ears deaf</sup> nor to the Voice which speaks in wind and storm, "The thunder of his power who shall understand?"

He learns patience and confidence too, he realizes the unwisdom of trying to solve by force situations which, if left to themselves, eventually simplify and water ally. He comes to appreciate the importance of those minor pleasures and satisfactions, each trifling in itself but together spreading over one's days a tissue of contentment. — the blossoming of a favorite plant; the caresses of his horse or dog, a gorgeous sunset or a lustrous moon, all these are real and perfect joys.

But it is not alone the aesthetic side of a man's character which such a life develops. It is not a mere fanciful idea or idle theory that has led us to consider a farm training as an excellent preparation for widely varying careers. Even as the farmer has a liberty of thought, of speech and of action greater than that granted to most men, so must he develop a corresponding self reliance and decision.

It is, perhaps, a truism to say that the increasing complexity of our society has made the individuals composing that society increasingly dependent. It is scarcely possible that a normal person should wish to return to that state of society in which the individual or at least the family was obliged to produce everything used in the family - to raise and dress the food, make cloth and clothing, build the house and even serve as physician. No doubt the greater part of the these duties can be accomplished by certain members of society for the entire society with the least possible expenditure of energy and material.

More and more frequently we hear the doctrine of centralization of the everyday duties of life, of house keeping activities and <sup>even</sup> of working for example. Such activities as the manufacture of cloth, and to a large extent the making of clothes, have long since been given over to factories.

Admirable as this is in most aspects, there seems to be a possibility of carrying it quite too far, so that one loses touch with the fundamental natural processes. When one's physical needs are completely satisfied by the simple process of exchanging bits of coin, or engraved paper for food, fire and lodging, without the necessity of exerting either the inventive faculties or the will, some weakening of moral fibre must result. Such a person, earning a living by some occupation which makes <sup>slight</sup> demands on the

power of decision or the ability to mark out a course of action is sure to find himself gradually less able to make such decisions. In a primitive state of society those who do not plan for themselves and provide for themselves perish; in a highly organized civilization this law is not inexorable, but there is still a high premium on providence and self-reliance.

The farmer has no opportunity for such aimless drifting. Freed from the irksomeness of that too close and too constant contact with other minds which is likely to direct one's thoughts to trivialities, he has the opportunity to become the companion of his own mind, and the leisure for contemplation. He learns to measure his own resources both for entertainment and for accomplishment as the man who is continually dependent on external stimuli for amusement can never do, and he tastes in full measure the greatly misprized joy of being alone.

However far his mental journeyings may lead since he is in no danger of losing his hold on the fundamentals, the actualities of life, of forgetting that apples grow on trees and not in boxes, or that milk comes primarily from cows and not from cans. He is concerned with the actual

creation of food stuffs, and with the creation of the raw material, at least, of textiles. The man whose products are corn and wheat, fat beefs and forthy hogs can never fail to realize that food and fire, shelter and clothing do not come of themselves but as the result of well directed effort.

Over our modern life is a veneer of artificiality which gives to many trifles a false importance and hides the real importance of certain fundamental facts. Of all these facts the most incapable is that while we live on the earth we must live from it. No matter how high we seem to rise above it, no matter with what veils of art and of architecture we seek to conceal the connection, the fact remains that bread is life, and the man who tills the earth that it may bring forth fruit stands at the very center of the realities. The disaster of a great war strips away all illusions and men see, as was seen in Germany during the Thirty Years War, as was seen in the South after the Civil War, the country whose wheat fields were turned battle fields, whose flower-horses must leave cavalry revolutions, whose hedges were slaughtered to feed friend and foe, at lengths surprised and exhausted, incapable of further defense, incapable of self support until

such time as her armies beat their swords into  
plowshares and the devastated fields brought  
forth a fresh crop.

The farmer may well be proud of his calling,  
proud alike of its ancient lineage and of its highest  
worth. His border is in the friendly fields of the earth  
which, as they leave his hands at least, can bring  
nothing but comfort and solace to all men of  
whatever nation he may belong, whether its  
wealth be in agriculture, in mines or in manufacture.  
He is of all working men the most essential for  
without him the others cannot live.