ALS IK KAN: NOTES: REVIEWS

ALS IK KAN

GARDENING AND SMALL FARMING

In order that we may make the Craftsman as serviceable as possible to its readers, we have of late been sending to our subscribers a printed slip asking for the frank expression of their opinion concerning the interest and importance of certain subjects which form an integral part of the policy of this magazine. The result has been most satisfactory, as it proves that we have not erred in our understanding of the most vital interests of people who are in sympathy with what we are trying to do. One of these queries asked for the views of our readers on the subject of small farming and gardening, and almost without exception the answers have indicated a desire for further information on this subject, showing the extent to which the idea of possessing a small country home has taken hold of dwellers in cities, and how eager people are to try what they can do toward making the soil yield them at least a part of their living, as well as much pleasurable occupation for leisure hours.

One letter says: "I think you would do your readers much service by publishing just as many articles as possible along the line of the one in the April issue entitled 'Three Acres and Chains.' Many of us have been stimulated to the point where we would like to take the bold step this woman took, but hesitate on account of the scanty information available showing the matter from the viewpoint of others' experience. I want to have dollars and cents arguments to show me that with moderate means and average good judgment country living can be made to afford a good living and not too many discomforts."

A MATTER OF EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE

Realizing the importance of just such information, we have been in communication with experts in agriculture, heads of experiment stations and others qualified by education and experience to answer this question. But from their letters in reply we find that even men who have devoted their lives to the subject cannot give any definite information along these lines any more than they can give a formula to make all men equally successful. Much is being done by the Department of Agriculture and also by many individuals working on a lesser scale to find some way to make small farming surely profitable and successful, but in the end it seems to be like all other problems in life,—a thing for each man to cope with and find his own solution. We have been much interested in the movement set on foot by Representative Dwight to bring into effective use certain agricultural areas within the State of New York, by endeavoring to repopulate the abandoned farms with intelligent and enterprising people who either know something of modern agricultural methods or who are anxious to learn. Nevertheless, we find that the general consensus of opinion among men who have given years to this work is that farming must once more be given its proper place among the industries of this country through the slow process of education, especially of the younger generation, and not by any specifics such as demonstration farms, colonization, or definite propaganda of any kind. This, of course, applies to the situation as it exists in the rural districts, rather than to the question of country life for city people, or farming as a secondary occupation for professional men, mechanics or skilled workers engaged in one or another of our great manufacturing industries, but the principle is the same for one as for another, and this principle involves a process of education more important than any that is taught in the schools.

THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION

The trouble with the "back to the land" propaganda has been too much enthusiasm and too little hard common sense. The article our correspondent refers to shows the experience of one enthusiast who attempted to make practical application of the glowing generalizations contained in a book upon this subject. The writer of "Three Acres and Chains," carried away by the fancied joys of country life as she had read of it in this and other books, gave up the profession by which she was earning a comfortable livelihood and, without any practical knowledge of farming, purchased three acres of land and endeavored to realize the promised liberty. Her experience should serve as an excellent corrective to the dreams of other enthusiasts, but we note that in spite of her chains she decided in the end that the experiment was worth while, chiefly because she had learned from personal experience what not to do, and had
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EVERY MAN MUST SOLVE HIS OWN PROBLEM

UNDoubtedly there are small farms that, under well-applied methods of intensive cultivation, yield an income quite sufficient to support a family in comfort, and that without any heart-breaking amount of labor or anxiety. But we are apt to forget that they do not do it at once or of themselves. It is right here that the man who believes that the mere ownership of three acres means heaven and a fortune makes his mistake, and it is the same old stumbling block that is encountered by the agricultural experts who endeavor to bring up the standard of farming by the means of demonstration farms either carried on under the auspices of the Government or by successful farmers in the neighborhood. The experience of one man never yet benefited another. The man who does not know how to do things must learn, but that is very different from feeling that the knowledge will come of itself or that he must be taught. If he feels the real interest that comes from the love of the thing he may go out upon his new farm an absolute ignoramus and learn something every day and hour of his life, making no move until he has satisfied himself so far as he can that it is the right one, and turning every failure and mistake to account as a part of the foundation he is laying for future success. When a man goes at it in that way nothing can keep him back, for he will solve his own problems by grappling with each situation as it arises, and he will meet and profit by the hardships that are never seen until we stumble over them. The man who approaches unfamiliar work in this spirit regards it merely as something to conquer, and he is bound to conquer it, but the man who goes into it with an idealistic view of its pleasant side and a well-arranged table of the profits that should accrue, is very apt to find the most important factor lacking from his calculations.

TEST IT AS A SECONDARY OCCUPATION

THEREFORE we do not hesitate to say that all information regarding this matter is at best only relative. One man's experience rarely serves as guide to another any more than different soils will produce equal quantities of the same crop. Our advice would be that farming on a small scale should be taken up as a secondary occupation until the experiment has been thoroughly tested. City people who live in the suburbs are doing this every day, and in many cases the experiment is entirely successful, as the man of the house can give his leisure time to working on his little farm or garden plot himself, and can keep a constant supervision of everything that is done, without sacrificing or neglecting his regular work. After a few years of this kind of experience, backed up by intelligent study of the subject, he would be equipped to take up farming as his main occupation if he were so disposed, and would be very likely to make a success of it.

WHERE A MECHANIC OFTEN WASTES TIME AND MONEY

THE same thing applies to the mechanic or factory worker, who perhaps needs more than anyone else the independence and the greater economy of living that could be brought about by having even an acre of ground rightly managed. This is comparatively an easy matter in the case of an employee of some big industrial concern which affords steady work year after year, but it is more difficult in the case of the mechanic who goes from one job to another and often has to travel a good distance from his home to his work. Although wages are much higher than they used to be, they do not benefit the man who earns the money, because the extra income is eaten up by extra expenses of living and transportation and by times of enforced idleness between jobs. It is amazing to see how many men whose work takes them to different parts of the country establish their families in the city and go out from there daily to any job within reach. Especially is this true of men engaged in the building trades, who will travel miles to and from their city flats to any job they happen to be engaged in, and will work for years in the same part of the country without ever seeming to see the advisability of going there to live. We have an example of this at Craftsman Farms, where we employ many carpenters, stone-masons and bricklayers to get the principal buildings into shape. Craftsman Farms is among the Orange Mountains in New Jer-
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sey, an hour by railroad and ferry from New York, yet most of these men live in Brooklyn and twice a day cross the Bridge to Manhattan, take the street car to a ferry on the North River, cross to the other side, and take a train to Morristown. Yet right in that part of New Jersey there is so much building going on that a skilled worker in any one of the building trades would be reasonably sure of occupation for years to come, and so much land to be obtained at the prices asked for ordinary farm land, that it would be no drag upon him to buy two or three acres and settle down almost anywhere within reach of his work, using all the time and strength he now wastes in profitless travel to build up a home for himself and his family.

WHOLESOOME USE OF IDLE TIME

The question of idle time also is a very important one. When a man is out of work he is uneasy and demoralized. The next job is always more or less uncertain, and he does not know what to do with himself between times. If he had a little place of his own he could put into good advantage every hour spent away from his regular work. He could learn the best methods of farming; he could cultivate the ground and harvest his crops; put up what buildings he needed for his own use; look after his chickens, and learn how to manage a farm by doing the thousand and one things that need to be done on even the smallest place. Thus he would not be without resources even when out of work. Between times, when the man of the family was away on one job or another, the wife and children would be taking care of the home and gaining the best possible training in farming, with the result that the whole family would almost before they knew it be equipped to become successful farmers if they so desired.

WHAT WE MEAN TO DO

We will certainly publish everything we can get that seems to us to have a bearing upon this subject. If it is a record of personal experience it will be valuable in suggestion to everyone interested in the same kind of work. But articles setting forth a theoretical account of what might be done under exceptionally favorable circumstances are not only useless but even dangerous, because their tempting array of figures might easily induce many people to give up their regular work for the apparently simple and easy occupation of farming, and find too late that their last state was worse than the first. We are at present working out carefully, with the assistance of expert farmers and gardeners, instructions illustrated by diagrams which we hope will serve to start some of our readers who are interested in this subject well upon the way toward becoming gardeners, or even farmers. We purpose to make these articles as simple and practical as possible, giving the main principles as definitely as we can and leaving the reader to do his own experimenting.

NOTES

CHARLES FROMUTH IN BRITTANY

The Brittany pictures of Charles Fromuth were exhibited in March at the Folsom Galleries. The pictures were all done in pastel from and about Concarneau, where Fromuth has lived all his life since leaving America. Upon first entering the Gallery where the pastels were hung, you had a sense of glowing figured draperies marred in places by the hanging of pictures, so gorgeously beautiful and inappropriate is the antique crimson drapery used to cover the walls. Slowly the insistent, more subtle beauty of the pictures prevailed, offering impressions in endless detail of the quaint, rich-toned life on the Brittany coast; all the interest of living conditions presented truthfully, yet held subservient to the artist’s joy in color, composition and profound love and understanding of the sea. Many men have loved and painted the land edges of the world. Whistler caught the mystery and lure of the seasound vessel, and Twachtman, too, with the smaller craft. But how few have ever sensed just the right grouping of masts and sails, the color, the line, the fine suggestion of impending speed, or total relaxation.

Fromuth has done this and more, much more, in his almost emotional use of color. What blues—from the blue of the sky to the blue of the famous nets of Concarneau spread to dry, and how beautifully balanced are the dull red of the sails and the soft browns of woods and clothes. The wind blows in from the sea and freshens the weary men toiling over the nets. Or the sun shines on the fisher children who add color and charm to a foreground.

It is all done so truthfully, simply, easily,