ONE ACRE AND HAPPINESS, AS DEMONSTRATED BY THE LITTLELANDERS OF SAN YSIDRO VALLEY: BY OLGA BRENNETEKE

To begin with, in order to understand the Littlelands movement you must disabuse your mind of almost every preconceived idea of farming, and lay yourself open to an astounding proposition. It is that no living man is capable of producing from one acre the utmost which it is capable of yielding. This is the basic proposition upon which the Littlelands movement is founded. It is no longer a theory, for scores of Littlelanders have proved it to be a fact.

It will be remembered that several years ago Bolton Hall, in advancing his propaganda of “a little land and a living,” set three acres as the minimum tract from which a man might be expected to support himself and a family. Since then several illustrations of accomplishment in the Eastern States have proved that half as much land or less, under intensive cultivation, will suffice for the purpose. On the Pacific Coast, where the tiller of the soil has the added advantage of constant summer, it has been demonstrated time and again that two acres or less, if intelligently handled, are quite enough to maintain five persons in comfort and leave them at the end of each year with a surplus of profit.

To return to the Littlelanders: the Colony in the Valley of San Ysidro, near San Diego, was established with deliberate design. The founders deemed it essential for the success of their experiment that the land occupied should be in the vicinity of a city. This was quite as much for social intercourse as for the advantage of a nearby market. Perhaps the success which has attended this departure from the usual lines of farming in the three years of its life has been due largely to the location of the Colony. The fact that the Littlelander has...
found it possible to support himself and his family upon one acre of land is less significant than that he has been able at the same time to secure for them contentment and happiness. His wife might not find happiness in sharing his work if it were not for the fact that the whole family may without great trouble or expense find diversion and relaxation in the nearby city.

The Littlelander is not necessarily limited to one acre of land. In a few cases newcomers have purchased more, but invariably they have found that one acre was as much as they could cultivate thoroughly without assistance. The hiring of help is not within the Littleland theory, because it is believed that the man working for wages will not devote himself wholeheartedly to his task, or if he should do so will soon break loose and become an independent cultivator. There are at present in the San Ysidro Valley upward of twenty families who are living more comfortable lives and enjoying greater happiness than they had ever known before; in the past these men, among whom are merchants, bookkeepers and cashiers, had had salaries averaging one hundred dollars a month or more. The present state of independence, abundance and confidence as to the future is derived from one acre of land and a house which is much more comfortable and attractive than their former homes.

The first object of the Littlelander is to supply his personal wants, and frequently everything eaten at his table is produced upon his own ground. Ducks, chickens, Belgian hares and, of course, every kind of vegetable, can be raised upon one acre of ground, leaving a considerable surplus for sale. The man who has never attempted to produce the utmost possible from one acre has very little idea of its extent or produc-

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At San Ysidro a one-acre tract has yielded sixty thousand heads of lettuce. On the other hand, the same area of ground is in many cases devoted to fifteen or twenty kinds of vegetables in marketable quantities, or to raising a flock of chickens or other fowl.

To take a specific illustration, a man who until he approached his sixtieth year was a bookkeeper in the Chicago stockyard came out to San Ysidro three years ago, and he declares that although he lived for a long time in constant dread of losing his position, he now wishes that he had been discharged before his hair turned white. With a salary of twenty-five dollars a week he was constantly in debt, and his life of incessant grind and worry left him each year with diminishing prospects and increasing burdens. After three seasons in San Ysidro, representing in their yield eight hours' daily work in the open air, he sums up as his assets greatly improved health, mental ease, absolute independence and a surplus of two or three hundred dollars at the end of each year.

While the Littleland Colony is in no sense communistic, cooperation is an important factor in its success. The profits accruing from the sale of land and water are devoted to the benefit of the settlers in general and are expended upon road and park improvements, lighting, school and library maintenance, etc. All such matters are discussed and voted upon at the regular Monday night weekly meetings, when women have an equal voice with the men in the decisions. Marketing is also done cooperatively. The Littlelander is his own best customer. He aims to supply his table unstintingly with the choicest of his products; consequently he has comparatively
little to sell and hardly anything to buy. None of his produce goes to waste. The community cart calls at his place daily and takes up anything that he may have to offer, even though it may be only twenty-five cents’ worth; combined with similar small quantities contributed by his neighbors, an amount is secured which is salable in San Diego, where the dealers are eager to obtain the fresh and unusually fine vegetables grown in the Valley of San Ysidro. In several instances the Littlelanders are making a living from one-half acre and less. It has been found that three hundred chickens and a house can be placed upon two town lots, leaving room for a small vegetable garden and a strip of lawn. In fact, if every square foot of the ground is turned to account, there seems to be almost no limit to what it will produce. In one or two instances the Littlelanders have achieved results that fairly astounded agricultural experts who made critical investigations of the Colony. After spending two days at the Colony, the director of one of our Government experiment stations said: “If this system might be extended throughout our Western States, it would support two billions of people in comfort, without infringing upon our forest reserves and mineral areas.” A significant fact in connection with the Littleland movement is that the majority of members of the Colony are men who formerly had little or no knowledge of or experience in farming. One of the founders of the Colony is an expert horticulturist whose services and advice are freely at the command of newcomers. It is his expressed opinion that men of intelligence but unhindered by the prejudices and methods of old-time farming may be counted upon for better results than those who have the fancied advantage of a knowledge of agriculture.

In an aggregation of one-acre farms the proximity of dwellings involves a degree of social life which is quite unknown in ordinary farming districts. Every Littlelander is within speaking distance of a neighbor, and as his work brings him almost literally into elbow touch with the man who is cultivating the adjacent acre, he inevitably learns to know him and to take an interest in his affairs.

If we should accept the theory of the Littlelander, and we must because it has been conclusively proved—that a family may be maintained in comfort and happiness by the exertions of one man upon a single acre of land—then we have a solution to some of the most widespread and pressing problems of the day.

It is not customary to look upon a New York lawyer as hovering upon the brink of poverty, but such, in truth, is his condition. A recent investigation has disclosed the fact that the average practicing attorney of the city earns less than three dollars a day. Consider for a moment the futility of effort in a field in which one is superfluous, the incessant struggle to maintain a station with nothing desirable in it, the pitiful and purposeless wear and tear, the unhappiness and unhealthfulness of such an existence, and then turn to the life of the man who owns no more than one acre of land, has everything he needs, is free from anxiety, free from debt, full of health and supported by the assurance that Nature, his landlord and his patron, will bountifully provide for all wants and afford a gracious return for all effort.