CHAPTER X

FARM LIFE

Occupationally, farm life was more varied and colorful during the interval between universal wheat growing and universal dairying than in either of those two periods. It was an age of eager, almost feverish experimentation. Most farmers were in debt and had to produce something which would pay interest and taxes, or else sell out and go west. Some tried to outwit the chinch bugs by sowing their wheat mixed with oats, gathering the combined crop, and then separating the two kinds of grain by means of the fanning-mill. A few tried a recommended method of horse hoeing their wheat. Many raised barley and rye as market substitutes for wheat, others raised tobacco, others hops. In the lake shore counties, particularly the northern ones, field peas became a prominent and valuable crop. In all of them the growing of hay for market was a favorite pursuit. Some, who lived near the cities, found relief from the stress caused by the succession of wheat failures in market gardening. Horticulture had been widely practised as a household art, to provide home fruits on the farm, but except in a few cases not as a major enterprise. Now, favored districts, especially the Door Peninsula, entered upon apple growing as a business, this to be combined in recent years with cherry growing. The northern frontier farmers raised hay, oats, and other supplies for the pineries.

1 The greater part of this chapter refers to the middle or pre-dairying period, and some of the illustrative facts are drawn from the author's recollections of his own boyhood on a southwestern Wisconsin farm.

2 A State Horticultural Society was organized about the beginning of the statehood period, under the leadership of men like Dr. Philo R. Hoy of Racine. It performed invaluable service to the state in the way ofpopularizing a love of fruits and flowers. It was said that the severe winter of 1856-57 almost totally destroyed the orchards grown prior to that date; but, nothing daunted, the society urged replanting and the planting of new orchards about all homes which were unsupplied.
The majority of the farmers in southern Wisconsin, however, turned their attention to livestock as the surest means of making a profit. There was little uniformity either in kind or in type of animals, and one might have seen a herd of grade Durham steers in one man’s pasture, a herd of common cows in that of the neighbor adjoining, horses in a third, and sheep in a fourth—depending on which the owners thought would pay best. A fifth farm might show few cattle, horses, or sheep, but its yards and clover fields would be overrun with hogs and pigs of all sizes and conditions.

Perhaps the closest parallel to or nearest successor of the former extensive wheat grower as a man of business was the farmer who fattened cattle on a considerable scale. Such men were to be found in all the corn growing counties. They raised big fields of corn in place of the former fields of wheat, bought up stock cattle through the countryside from farmers having a few head each, fed out their corn and, when the cattle were fat, either shipped to Chicago themselves or sold to big dealers. The business called for a good deal of capital, which only a few could command, good judgment in selecting animals, and shrewd bargaining both in buying and in selling. Some farmers succeeded where others failed, and the successful cattle feeders rose to be almost a distinct class. They had business and social relations with other cattle men, as well as with the numerous farmers from whom they bought, with bankers, and with city commission merchants. In addition, some of them were money lenders and held the mortgages on much farm property in their neighborhoods. This gave them power but not unmixed popularity. Thus the cattle feeding farmer enjoyed some of the opportunities and advantages which came to the western ranchman. But, unlike the ranchman, who was free, venturesome, untired, he often took his full share of the hard, plodding labor of field and barnyard, remaining what the other would be apt to call “a hayseed farmer.”

* Cattle feeding as an alternative to dairying is still a business of considerable importance in certain sections of the state, notably the southwestern counties.
Corresponding to the variety of farm activities was a kaleidoscopic diversity in farms and farm buildings. Fields were still enclosed, for the most part, fences being of boards, or boards and wire, of barbed-wire alone, of poles, and of the old "worm fence" type, which, however, was disappearing in the older districts. Buildings for housing the livestock were of every description, from the permanent hillside barn, well protected above the stone work by means of a coat of red paint, or the all frame type, built wholly above ground, with hayloft on the second floor, to the pioneer's frame of poles covered with straw. Cows were not generally stabled for milking but were milked in the "cow yard." Next to the diversity due to different types of farming was the picturesqueness imported into the rural neighborhoods through the mingling together of several distinct racial stocks. Although the southeastern counties were originally occupied almost exclusively by people from the Northeast and from Ohio, it was not long before many foreigners, especially Scandinavians, Germans, Irish, and Welsh, were distributed among them. The Town Studies of the Wisconsin Domesday Book illustrate the point, showing how Mount Pleasant, for example, came to have one-third of its people of foreign birth, Whitewater one-fourth, and so on. Proportions like these left the general character of the community American, but the infusion of foreign blood showed in several ways. While many immigrants came with money and bought good farms at once, some at first were poor. Such people lived in the log houses abandoned by the older farmers, or built new log or cheap frame houses on small tracts purchased to make the beginnings of their farms. Some of their children might be "hired out" to nearby farmers, the boys as field help, the girls as housemaids. Meantime, their farms were started, and with hard work and thrift they were often enlarged until the labor of all the family was required properly to work them.

*Hamlin Garland's memory of the cow yard, as presented both in his short stories and in A Son of the Middle Border, is perhaps typical of the sense of loathing generated in sensitive minds by that institution.*
Every foreign element had its own peculiar customs both inside the home and outside. In cookery they introduced new dishes, in gardening new plants and new varieties of flowers. Germans, Scandinavians, Bohemians, and others were wedded to gardening as a feature of home making. Some Americans also were excellent gardeners, but many of them were content to raise a few things only, like early potatoes, some cabbages and melons. With the foreigners gardening was a household art. The women and younger children performed the labor, and the garden—a small plot of ground next the house, highly fertilized, cultivated intensively, fenced against poultry by means of either pickets or woven willows—was apt to be a charming little world with its plats separated by lily bordered paths growing scores of different esculents, its currant and gooseberry bushes lining the fence, and its clusters of decorative flowers, shrubs, and vines. Perhaps there was also a "summer house" of lattice work covered with morning-glory. Though the houses of immigrants might be inferior to those of their American neighbors, their gardens, which guests were always glad to visit, compensated them in large measure.

On their first little farms the foreigners frequently used oxen when horses were the rule among all other farmers. This made an interesting variation, both in the fields and on the highways. The foreign costumes, mode of speech, and social practises all differed at first from the American, but tended rapidly to grow less distinctive. The children in the schools were the quickest to assimilate American speech and customs, the women in the homes the last. But where immigrants of the same race lived in colonies, as in the northern lake shore counties and a few other sections, these changes proceeded much more slowly. There many old-world customs descended even to the grandchildren.

A significant fact in connection with earlier foreign immigrants to Wisconsin was the almost universal training of the adult in some line of useful endeavor. Among those who had not been farmers at home nearly all had some trade or craft, learned by apprenticeship. There were carpenters,
A WALWORTH COUNTY FAMILY

Grandparents emigrated from New England, children and grandchildren born in Wisconsin

RESIDENCE OF HENRY NATESTA, BERGEN, ROCK PRAIRIE

Modern phase of a Norwegian farm home
THE DISAPPEARING RAIL OR VIRGINIA "WORM" FENCE

SAUSAGE GRINDER MADE BY A GERMAN IMMIGRANT
Original in the State Historical Museum
cabinet makers, turners, plasterers, masons, painters, weavers, spinners, metal workers, book binders, musicians, millwrights, and wheelwrights. Occasionally, to the amusement of acclimatized immigrants, someone would appear who was equipped with a trade which, though very usable in the old country, had no market value here—for example, a tiler, or roof slater. Often enough these callings had little relation to the business of farming, yet nearly always the special skill showed somewhere in the arrangements of farm or home, and often it became invaluable to the neighborhood. If nothing more, the presence of men possessing such special gifts produced a healthful wonderment in the young. The foreign craftsmen who actually functioned—for example, woodworkers and iron workers—were better trained than the Americans in the same lines, just as foreign trained farmers were closer, more careful cultivators. Consequently, their skill fixed the standards for the communities. Many a fine, though unpretentious, farmhouse enjoys distinction today as a relic of the pioneer period because some clever foreign trained carpenter, brick layer, or mason was given a free hand in its construction and played architect as well as builder. Hundreds of pieces of farmhouse furniture and bric-a-brac owe their existence to the same source of artistic skill and good workmanship. Since everyone who had the opportunity to do so, naturally tried to reproduce the types of buildings and furniture with which he was familiar in the old country, some degree of variety was introduced by them into the environments of Wisconsin farm neighborhoods.

If we were to extend this discussion to conduct and intellectual influences, one might say that the elaborate, formal courtesy displayed by well-bred foreign immigrants often left its impress upon sensitive youth, while the new horizons touched by their conversation about European politics, military history, and social life excited the imagination of many an American boy and girl. Even the superstitious folk tales of ghosts and giants related to children by foreign domestics and by hired men supplied a tinge of poetic color to lives which
were all too completely immersed in existing realities. Their songs and instrumental music, so different from the prevailing church music and the sentimental love songs of the Americans, made another favorable contrast. On the other hand, the tendency among many foreigners to make excessive beer drinking a feature of their amusements created a very unfavorable impression upon the more rigid church-going temperance people, and reinforced their determination to do away with the liquor saloon by means of legal restrictions.

There was much individuality in the way farmers, both Americans and foreigners, performed their farm work. To be sure, as in any other business, some men were industrious and clever workers, others were sluggish, careless, or lazy. But, in addition to that universal difference the good workers had methods of their own. One would depend more on hand work, like hoeing corn instead of cultivating with the use of horses, or cradling his small fields of grain instead of using the reaper. Another, more business-like, would use horse power for everything. In general, the Americans were apt to be horse farmers, the foreigners hand farmers; but there were many exceptions. Some would rise at an unconscionable hour, say half past three, and work until after dark; others followed the good old rule and labored in the field "from sun to sun." If the hired men on Wisconsin farms had been diarists, one would obtain pictures of interesting farmer personalities as seen by their underlings. Every neighborhood had its hard drivers, who so overworked their men that it became difficult for them to secure hands.

After the introduction of factory dairying, it was almost the universal practise to begin field work late in the morning and close early in the evening, say at half past five. But in the earlier period, the occasional farmer (usually an American) who followed that practise was looked upon by his neighbors as "lazy and shiftless," notwithstanding the appearance of his crops, livestock, home, and barnyard belied such a conclusion. The greatest divergence prevailed with respect to work on Sunday. Religious people generally kept Sunday
free from all work save the "chores." Some of them, however, made rather free use of the biblical permission to drag one's ass or ox out of a pit on the Sabbath day. The trouble was that they were not at all literal in defining ox or ass, or in defining pit. The words covered any emergency job, and the habit, once formed, of doing exceptional jobs on Sunday, such jobs easily became numerous enough to occupy the farmer practically every Sunday in summer. And in those days, when the farmer worked on Sunday his men usually worked, his children worked, and of course his teams worked. The effect was a loss of morale all around. Those farmers, whether churchgoers or not—and many non-churchgoers were in that class—who rigorously kept Sunday as a day of rest for man and beast, encouraging the hired men to spend it well, in a restful way, giving the work animals a few hours of much relished freedom and smiling on the children's play, were supporters of a far wholesomer type of rural life.

Religiously, those communities appear to have been most prosperous whose people were mainly of the same speech and same social condition even if they varied somewhat in religious beliefs. Some of the American communities worshiped very harmoniously in that Protestant church which suited the majority sect, whether Presbyterian, Methodist, or some other. And the same was true of Germans, Scandinavians, and English or Welsh. Old Lutheran and Reformed did not always have separate churches, though when each sect was numerous they commonly did. Unity in other matters made unity in religion easier to achieve. Some churches, however, which were homogeneous doctrinally were divided racially and manifested much disharmony.

The organizers of churches, both Catholics and Protestants, were often men of powerful personality who were able to contribute largely to the building up of rural life on its spiritual and intellectual sides. Yet it is doubtful if their work as institution builders was always beneficial. Overzeal in the interest of the denominations they represented induced them frequently to start a second organization where one already ex-
isted, or a third within a township having two others, thus weakening the support of all and making it impossible finally for the rural churches to maintain themselves against the rivalry of town and village. Many an abandoned wayside church stands as an accusing witness to such mistaken missionary effort. It is also true that changes in rural life, the shifting of the population, the emigration of some of the original families, the influx of new families of a different faith, and particularly improvements in locomotion—better roads, lighter vehicles, speedier roadsters, the auto—all have helped to rob the rural communities of many once flourishing churches.

The old-time camp meeting, a distinctively rural phenomenon, entered Wisconsin soon after its settlement from the East. In August, 1838, there was held such a meeting in the grove along Root River near Racine, which is said to have been attended by hundreds of pioneer families from all the southeastern counties. It was the first one held in that section, if not the first in the state. The appointments were identical with those described by Eggleston and other writers on religious conditions in the West. For example, the grounds at night were lighted in the regulation camp meeting fashion, by means of great fires built on elevated stages floored with poles and covered with earth. Such meetings continued to be held periodically in some communities until less than forty years ago. They have for the most part given place to the "tabernacle" revival meetings, now always centered in the towns.

The intensity, or drive, which the farmer put into the work on the farm affected the children most directly. To the man who was intent merely upon getting more and more acres cultivated though it required night and Sunday work to do it, the time of his children was chiefly valuable for the amount of help they could give him. Their schooling was entirely secondary, their recreational needs not even considered. Play was opposed to work. The boy who loved to play was apt to

*See Racine Argus, Aug. 15, 1838, for a full description of the meeting.
be stigmatized as "too lazy to work," and a similar judgment often fell with crushing weight on the boy or girl who was more than ordinarily fond of books and reading. The probability is that about the same proportion of farm children were gifted in those days as at present, yet statistics of high school, academy, normal school, and college prove that the number who actually secured an opportunity for full intellectual development was exceedingly small in comparison with the numbers who have that opportunity today. The reason is to be sought partly in the earlier deficiency of schools and the obstacles which an inflexible course of study placed in the paths of would-be scholars. But mainly it is to be found in the family's hardship involved in losing a boy's time from the farm labor and in finding the means of meeting inescapable expenses. Very few farmers, comparatively, could afford both the loss of a boy's time and the school expenses, so that if a boy really cared greatly to pursue learning he might reckon on a program which would entail sacrifice. For example, he would be obliged to work for his board, or else take time to earn money between the years or even the terms of schooling. Not infrequently the process was so long and so laborious that graduation found the candidate a mature man of thirty, with plenty of experience behind him to establish a firm, self-reliant character. "Getting an education," as the story of John Muir proves, was an heroic enterprise which remorselessly tested the ambition and moral stability of boys as well as their intellectual powers.⁶

Despite its barrenness in many respects, the neighborhood district school was far more apt to be the inspirer of boys and girls than was the home, the church, or other social influence to which the young were exposed. With all its shortcomings the school was the one avowed "literary institution" of the countryside. Many of the rural school teachers in our period were men of considerable attainments, sometimes

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⁶ John Muir, The Story of My Boyhood and Youth (Boston, 1913), contains the story of a Wisconsin farm boy's struggle to obtain an education.
boasting college degrees. Frequently they were graduates of some eastern academy or normal school. They taught rural schools in order to gain a teaching apprenticeship before taking higher teaching positions, or as a stepping stone to one of the other learned professions, or to a business career. A few were farmers in the summer and teachers in the winter. Every neighborhood has its tradition of noted teachers of this type who left a lasting impression upon the community.

It was these men, in large part, who were responsible for the steady trickle of students into the schools of higher learning from country neighborhoods. Sometimes the direct word of advice or encouragement fired a boy’s mind; more often perhaps it was the opportunity for self-testing furnished by the class competitions, literary and declamatory contests, and debates. For the live rural teacher stirred his pupils by arousing the whole community to an interest in what the school was doing, and by making the schoolhouse a social center in addition to a focus of intellectual activity. He arranged spelling matches which drew in the best spellers from adjoining districts to compete with his scholars, his school exhibits brought in most of the people of the district, and the debates, notwithstanding the strongly theoretical subjects commonly chosen, occasionally attracted wide attention through the county.7

School entertainments by no means exhausted the social and recreational facilities of farm neighborhoods, although they constituted a very important part of them. The “singing school,” also conducted at the schoolhouse, was a valid excuse for the assembling of boys and girls; and when the peripatetic singing master, as sometimes happened, was both a good instructor and a strong personality, the cultural influence of the

7 A Racine County school (No. 3) in 1868 debated the question “Shall the United States acquire the island of Cuba?” The liquor question, woman’s suffrage, capital punishment were all favorite subjects for school literary society debates.
THE MEYER FARM

Home of Balthasar Henry Meyer during his student days at Oshkosh State Normal and University of Wisconsin

HICKORY HILL FARM HOME OF JOHN MUIR DURING HIS STUDENT DAYS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

From his Story of My Boyhood and Youth. By courtesy of the Houghton Mifflin Company
AN UP-TO-DATE FARM AND FARM HOME, POLK COUNTY, WISCONSIN
A FARM "SPRING HOUSE"
From Eggleston's *A Circuit Rider*

A PIONEER HOUSEHOLD CHEESE PRESS USED IN RICHLAND COUNTY
Original in State Historical Museum
WILLIAM DEMPSTER HOARD

WILLIAM AARON HENRY
Head of the College of Agriculture from 1881 to 1907
meetings was not inconsiderable. Their occasional concerts drew a more than local audience.

About the year 1880 or 1881 (at least in southwestern Wisconsin) farm boys began to organize baseball clubs modeled after those already familiar in the towns. Having no Saturday afternoon holiday, the practise meets and games were placed on Sunday afternoon. They attracted all of the young folks, a good many of the elders, and of course the farm hands. The result was wholesome in several ways. Though the games cost the players doubly sore muscles for a day or two during each week, and occasionally a broken finger, these gatherings put the cumulative force of social coöperation behind the unuttered demand of children for a recognition of the right to play. Incidentally, they went far to abolish Sunday work on farms and, by a natural reaction on the part of the church people, led in many places to the custom of a Saturday half-holiday.

All the world knows about the country ball or "dance" of forty or fifty years ago, where dances were mostly quadrilles, the music "fiddling," and the movements of the dancers guided less by art than by what, in terse country phrase, has been called "main strength and awkwardness." This signifies that the dancers' reactions to the rhythm of the music and the directions of the prompter were dictated by natural impulses gradually modified by experience, observation, and self-criticism; not that they were necessarily devoid of grace and harmony. Boys and girls learned to dance by dancing in public as participants in a four-couple quadrille, with no preliminary private lessons to familiarize them with the motions, the changes, or the etiquette to be observed toward partners and others. To many an awkward youth the "first dance" was his social "baptism with fire," but those who possessed the right qualities were molded thereby with surprising

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8 The state had some noted singing masters, like Luther Lyman of Whitewater, who maintained the same itinerary year after year for perhaps fifteen years, training an entire generation. Some of the singing masters were foreigners of excellent preparation. W. D. Hoard also was a singing school master for several years.
promptness into well poised, courteous, gentlemanly fellows.

From the standpoint of social training, the country dance performed a service of obvious value. Unfortunately, in many neighborhoods dancing tended to become too exclusive a form of recreation, thus depriving young people of other forms which were more educational or more healthful. Worst of all, balls of a public character were generally commercialized and they often came under the baleful influence of the saloon, of reckless drinkers, and of the rowdy element. On moral grounds some religious denominations opposed dancing, and every community was likely to have a pro-dancing party challenged by a no-dancing party, which sometimes gave rise to bitter contests over questions of social policy. Perhaps no one thing did more to impair the social unity of neighborhoods, and to paralyze plans for providing wholesome recreation, than the eternal question of dancing or no dancing.

Many farmers made "going to town" more or less a weekly holiday, taking Saturday for that purpose quite as regularly as the women took Monday for wash-day. The Saturday trade was a kind of "clearance sale" for the village storekeepers, although prices were not marked down and little cash changed hands. The farmers brought in whatever they had to sell, especially butter and eggs, whose value would be checked off against the purchases and the balance charged or —more rarely—credited. But buying and selling was only the incentive of these weekly trips, not the exclusive motive. Farmers who had the habit would make an excuse to go to town even if there was no business justification for it. They felt the need of the customary relaxation, of dressing up, of the opportunity for conversation, for learning the news of the wider neighborhood, and for "seeing what was going on." Those who developed the saloon habit and wasted their time and money carousing are not considered in the above description.

*See the report of an excoriating sermon on dancing, in Stirling W. Brown, In the Limestone Valley (1900), 168–172.
The village merchant is not often credited with a social function, yet his store was a genuine social center. Perhaps for the older people it was the most important single social opportunity aside from the church, and its value for that purpose varied with the character of the storekeeper. In some cases he was an original and striking personage, men of inferior personality being apt quickly to fail. Dealing with a group of families which remained relatively constant, he gradually acquired much detailed knowledge of their affairs and could instantly speak the name of practically every man and woman of the countryside. He would see to it that the persons assembled in the store became acquainted with one another. He was always able to start the conversation with a pertinent question directed to this one, a comment uttered here, a remark countered there. The store of such a man was always on Saturday a buzzing reception hall with people coming and going, with groups of men and women constantly joined in the most spontaneous because unconscious and incidental social intercourse.\(^\text{10}\)

The children and young people received less benefit from the town going habit than the elders, because their trips to town were less frequent and not at all regular. They went in force only on special occasions, such as Fourth of July, circus day, and fair time.\(^\text{11}\)

It will be understood that the farm life above described was that of the open country, away from centers of population. Some farming communities were situated in the immediate neighborhoods of cities, towns, or prosperous villages, and their families participated in many of the social opportunities enjoyed by the urban people. They took advantage of the

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\(^\text{10}\) See Grant Shoverman, *A Country Chronicle* (New York, 1916). He gives a marvellously lifelike picture of the evening conference at the store (in Brookfield, Waukesha County) about 1880. He depicts the types of farm work, including sugar making, and also gives dramatic descriptions of the country ball and other rural amusements.

\(^\text{11}\) But it was a kind of vacation to them to have the parents away once a week. Work was less strenuous at such times, supervision was lax, and the spirit of fun rampant. Then, too, it was exciting to speculate about what the parents would bring home on their return.
church services, the school, the library, the theatre, the recreational facilities, and the varied means of keeping in touch with the outside world which were denied to dwellers in the open country. Such families, so long as they prospered economically, had no serious social problems to meet. For they might live as well as the prosperous families in town and mingle socially with such families. But any falling-off in income meant a corresponding decline in status. Expenses being higher near the city than farther out, general farmers often failed to make ends meet. These farmers accordingly sold out to others—largely foreigners—who lived more simply, adopted more intensive methods, raised more produce, and made the farms pay. Herein we find part of the explanation for the prevailing foreign cast of the suburbanite farming population. Another is the fact that so many of the later foreign immigrants came from cities, where they were habituated to the delights of a well developed social life which they were unwilling to exchange for the compensations afforded by a home in the open country. They understood how to get the most out of a few acres of land, were accustomed to land values much in excess of those encountered in Wisconsin; some of them came well supplied with money to buy, and others were willing to mortgage the future, for many years, in order to obtain present enjoyment of a farm close in. A glance at successive series of land ownership charts of townships adjacent to the lake cities will show how, little by little, English names disappeared to be replaced by those of German, Dutch, Scandinavian, Bohemian, and Polish origins. A town like Sheboygan Falls, once occupied largely by farmers from New York, is now held in smaller tracts and farmed more intensively by farmers who are mainly Germans.

The process of rural development, coupled with the extraordinary growth of towns, has already brought about a vast
increase in the suburbanite class of farmers. In effect also
the motor car and good roads make it possible for those living
not more than eight or ten miles from town or city to do their
weekly shopping on Saturday night, after chores, as easily as
formerly they could do it by taking the entire day. And it
becomes equally practicable for them to enjoy the church, the
theatre, lectures, and entertainments held in the near-by town,
while they can visit more distant places with economy and
eas ease. Thus farmers have now a vastly enlarged sphere of
action, a larger circle of friends and acquaintances, and a
multitude of social opportunities where formerly they had but
few.

All this proves beneficial to the rural family provided money
is forthcoming to pay for the car and its upkeep, for the good
roads, for the better attire of the young people, who now insist
on city styles in all personal appointments, for a home with
modern conveniences, especially flowing water, bathroom,
electric light (or its equivalent), and for such household
furniture, musical instruments, books, and magazines as are
found in the city homes where the young folks visit and whose
members they expect to entertain. In addition, the expense of
educating children is greater, high school training being now
a customary supplement to the graded school, and a college
course, or at least special agricultural and home economics
courses, being desired by a large proportion. Thus the suc-
cess of farm life on the social side depends on the ability of
the farmer to make the farm yield a more generous income
than that to which earlier farmers were accustomed.

In the new dairying, farmers have developed a methodology
of success which may illustrate also what is possible in other
lines. So many of the processes involved have been standard-
ized that, assuming a reasonable or normal market, results
can be predicted with a good deal of accuracy. In the old days
making butter to sell was a species of gambling, if only be-
cause the farmer had the vaguest ideas as to how much butter

13 This at the moment of writing does not exist, and it creates the most acute
country life problem, demanding statesmanlike handling.
his cows would produce in the year, what amount and value of food they consumed, or what expenses were incurred in production. Today farmers have the means of determining food costs and labor costs, while the almost universal practise of testing butter fat production of cows gives to the herd an ascertained character and value in production. Moreover, breeding for performance has become, if not a science, at least a very widely understood and successfully practised art. Within uncertain but wide limits it is now known to be practicable to increase production by careful breeding; the farmer has his choice of a large number of recorded herds from which to select breeding stock, he has at his command the scientific advice of successful breeders, of the agricultural college, and of the county agricultural agent. It has been historically demonstrated many times that a herd of cows which averages 200 pounds of butter fat can be improved by breeding and selection among the offspring until in a few years it is a 300-pound herd and soon thereafter a 400-pound herd. With purebreds records much higher than that have been obtained.

It has also been shown that by using silage in summer as well as in winter, and by feeding soiling crops instead of pasturing exclusively, the unit of land per cow can be greatly reduced. Hiram Smith's ideal, as far back at least as thirty-five years ago, was 100 cows on 100 acres. His land was among the very best Wisconsin farm land for growing forage crops, roots, etc., and he may not have attained his ideal, but he and many others have approximated that standard. Accordingly, the farmer who has a small farm, say 60 or 80 or even 40 acres, can today hope to succeed as a dairyman. In the past he could not do so, and therefore, when dairying became dominant the small farmer sold out to his neighbor and left Wisconsin just as, forty years earlier, his prototype in Vermont and in New York left those states to go to Wisconsin, Iowa, and Illinois. It was the departure from southern Wisconsin communities of so many small farmers that explains the actual reduction of the farm population in those counties at recent census periods. Obviously, the only prac-
ticable way to increase the rural population is to increase the number of farm families, and that, in a well settled country, means dividing the larger farms into smaller farms. The process of division has begun, and it constitutes the chief basis of hope that our rural population will be built up in numbers while retaining and improving the economic status already achieved. It is easy to estimate that 20 cows averaging 400 pounds will make more profit for their owner than 40 300-pound cows. And if the 20 cows are maintained on 40 acres while the 40 cows required 160 acres, the profits will be further augmented by the saving of three-fourths of the land, which could be supporting other families to help maintain roads, consolidated schools, churches, and rural parks—thus raising farm life to the same plane of success socially that in normal times under the most approved system of farm management it occupies economically.

The End