EDUCATION OF THE FARMER’S WIFE.

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I am a firm believer in Farmers’ Institutes and always glad of the privilege of attending one in this beautiful and hospitable county seat of ours. I was asked to read a paper at this Institute, and the subject I have chosen to write a few suggestions about, is the education of the farmer’s wife.

The farmer’s wife requires a large and extended knowledge of a great many things. Of course she should be well grounded in the elementary branches taught in our schools—arithmetic, reading, spelling, writing, grammar and geography. After these I think she should acquire a pretty thorough knowledge of and training in vocal music, and instrumental also if she can afford it, but surely if she can’t afford the instrumental she can the vocal, for the throat is a wonderful instrument when by cultivation and practice its range is 2 1-2 octaves or more. And a home without music and without singing is deprived of one of the greatest pleasures of life, and one of the most tender influences. Auerbach says, “Music washes away from the soul the dust of every day life.”

The late ex-Governor Fairchild said when he visited the cooking school which was held here at the Roundup Institute in 1895 that it was a habit to say “an honest man is the noblest work of God,” but he thought a good cook was the noblest work of God; and that there was more truth than poetry in the old saying that the royal road to a man’s heart is through his stomach. So it must be of great importance that the farmer’s wife (and other women as well) who usually do all the cooking or at least have to oversee it done, should have a good knowledge of the great art of cooking. She should know how, and be able to make good bread and to cook meats, vegetables, and pastry, coffee and tea, so as to be both palatable and healthful.

It is well to know proportion in arithmetic but it is just as necessary for a woman to know the proportion of saleratus to sour milk, or baking powder to sweet milk, and the other things accordingly. And as I believe there is intemperance practiced in a great many things (if you doubt it look up the definition of intemperance in Webster’s International dictionary), I also believe it is a woman’s duty at all times to put in a word against intemperance, for we all know, or ought to know, that it is unhealthful and degrading to both soul and body. Let us also study our cooking and see to it that there is no intemperance practiced in that, by using too highly spiced and seasoned foods, and too rich, which is also unhealthful. I hope the time is
not far distant when there will be cooking schools established at every county seat, or some other convenient place, where the girls can attend a regular course of cooking, pass an examination, get a diploma, and that it will be considered an accomplishment to have this diploma, just as well as to be able to play Mendelssohn or Handel on the piano.

Again the farmer's wife is so often called upon to attend the sick, and being generally remote from the doctor and required to administer to the suffering, she ought to have a good knowledge of the human body, its diseases, and treatment. This can all be acquired by a very little labor and small expense. She should know the general laws of health and proper sanitary conditions. Her education would be incomplete unless she has learned to cut and fit to advantage, the various garments used in her household, and to do this not only for comfort and economy, but for beauty as well. Most children get their ideas of the beautiful and good from their mothers. To continue this practical education, she should read good books and magazines and reflect. Edmund Burke says that "reading without reflection is like eating without digesting," and no doubt that is true. One book she always has and that is the bible; this is the best of reading for it contains words of wisdom as well as the knowledge of salvation.

I believe it to be her duty to familiarize herself with the grand sayings and teachings of the holy scripture, and her life will be made happier. She should cultivate a cheerful disposition; her trials are many and severe and unless she is hopeful and cheerful by natural disposition, or acquire these virtues by practice and cultivation, her life will be hard, the children quarrelsome, and the home dismal.

The farmer's wife should thoroughly understand the keeping of accounts, for to her is left most of the buying, and she is largely responsible for the expense of living, and by entering the ordinary business transactions in an orderly way, much trouble will be averted, and the wife becomes the trusted and indispensable companion of her husband without whose assistance and counsel, he attempts nothing. These are a few things I believe a farmer's wife ought to know and her education be along these lines.

I now will close by quoting what Hanford says:

"I am willing a woman should read Latin and Greek;
Should German and French and Italian speak;
And be up in the latest aesthetical freak,
If she only knows chicken from turkey,
I'd like her in music and song to take part,
Read poetry, science, and cultivate art,
If husband and children were first in her heart,
And if she knew chicken from turkey;—"

"Knew barley from rice, knew a tart from a pie;
A boil from a stew, a broil from a fry;
And if she went into the market to buy,
Knew very well chicken from turkey.
For to make home happy, all knowledge must blend;
Art, science, and service their benefits lend;
Then, ladies so clever and wise condescend,
To know about chicken and turkey."