The Influences of Rural Life.

AN

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DELIVERED BEFORE THE

NORFOLK AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY,

At Dedham, Sept. 29, 1859.

BY

HENRY F. DURANT, ESQ.

PUBLISHED BY THE SOCIETY.

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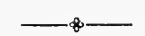

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is very true that I am not here to-day to attempt to give you any instruction in agriculture, scientific or practical; I have no claims to be heard upon such subjects, and I am very much afraid that if I should make the attempt you would all laugh at my farming. I understood very well when I was requested to address you upon the subject of which you have heard, that this day and occasion were not devoted solely to an interchange of experience and opinions upon the important practical questions, the old knowledge, the new lights, the experiments, the success, and the progress of agriculture. These, indeed, are among the foremost objects of your association, but there is a common ground where we can all meet to learn something from each other. There are other objects in this Society, there are other uses in agriculture, than the growing of corn merely. There are other lessons to be learned in the wide fields and the green meadows, than the art of the best soils, and manures, and crops. The country has other instructions than in thrift and good husbandry, and we shall do well to pause for a while, even in the bustle and excitement of a day like this, to interchange our thoughts upon the objects and uses, the influences, the ends, and the aims of this rural life—this home in the country which we can all share and enjoy, and by which, if we will, we can all be improved and elevated. Let us try, then, to understand this mystery of living. Let us search out the keys to these secrets and riddles which

surround us. Let us endeavor to understand what this life in the country is. Let us know whether it is indeed good for us to be here.

Do not fear that I am about to inflict upon you any of those sentimentalities of sweet rural felicity, which were at one time so much in fashion. The day of that unreal pastoral poetry is over. All those pictures of wonderful shepherdesses, with unimaginable crooks, and most extraordinary flounces, tending gentle sheep, only less simple than themselves, while their faithful swains, in doublet and hose, the very pink and point device of fashion, piped all the dreary day their love and happiness, until one is fain to believe that even an anticipated hour of that purgatory in which good Catholics believe, would have been a relief,—all these are gone, or live only in the fading paper hangings of some quiet old mansion, or in the more faded pages of Laura Matilda, and the Della Cruscan school.

We are too practical, too much in earnest, too thoughtful also, to accept these vague, unreal dreams, or be satisfied with such views of rural life.

What is this living then—this life,—whether it be life in the city, or in the country? It is education—education in the largest and widest sense, *that* is the great mystery of life. We are not here to pass away a measured number of years only, a pebble can do that, the dumb beasts do that; we are here to educate, to unfold, to develop ourselves. Not the education of schools or college, or books alone, but the education of living, the development of heart as well as brain, of the affections and moral nature, as well as the understanding—and of those higher faculties, which are the earnest and the prophecy of that other life, for which they are unfolding, even as the wings of the fledgling in unfolding, are the promise and prophecy of his future migrations, beyond the mountain and across the wide ocean. I hold then, that beyond all question, as compared with city life, this life in the country, for all the objects and ends of this *real* culture and education, gives to man, not only the best, but the indispensable opportunities and advantages: the only text books, the true great library, the real instruction, the best teachers.

Although this theme is far too wide for any address like this, let us examine it in a few aspects, and consider a few thoughts,

at least, which may be suggestions, leading to future meditation and reflection.

First, then, in a practical and utilitarian point of view merely, this rural life educates and instructs us all, and repeats its lessons daily and hourly, from the cradle to the grave. There are higher ends in life, most certainly, than its merely utilitarian and practical necessities. There are higher objects of knowledge than what we call common sense. There are nobler pursuits than making money or owning houses and lands. But the daily lessons of utility, the practical duties and obligations of life, are necessary. You know very well that the ripe juices, the enriching sweetness of corn and grain, would all be worthless and in vain, if it were not for the hard and tasteless flint, the silex which forms the supporting stalk and stem of the waving grain and the golden corn. Even so is it with life: there are laws which we must obey, and hard and distasteful lessons which we must learn—supporting and sustaining lessons of prudence, of utility, and of practical duty.

Reflecting upon these subjects, I cannot but believe, that foremost among the daily lessons of life in the country, is nature's harsh, but kindly democracy, not the democracy of parties, but that lofty and genuine republican democracy, which is higher than politics or parties—the democracy which teaches us the dignity of labor—the true self-respect and independence that we gain, when for the first time we *realize* the great truth which nature teaches, that the only real life of a true man is devoted to patient, thoughtful labor. Let us not shrink away from this first aspect of rural life as if from a harsh teacher, for this law is the lesson of a mother's love, and with it we hear from the same voices—of the dignity of labor, of the happiness which labor alone can give.

If we listen more earnestly, if we look higher, we learn, too, that labor is the only true nobility, that work truly is *worship*. This is not the lesson of every day life and experience only, but it leads to loftier ends also. Remember the brilliant example of that great man who has told us, in the story of his "Schools and Schoolmasters," the influences of nature and this rural life upon his own culture. Hugh Miller, the wonderful stone mason of Cromarty, learned and practised these lessons well, and he hammered away, year after year, at the wild quarries of the Old Red Sandstone, until they surrendered up the secrets which had

been given to their keeping unnumbered ages ago, and in toil and sorrow, and gladness and deep exultation, he read there the wondrous story of the rocks, the marvellous annals of Creation.

Think of this for a moment, as it reveals itself to us in the practical form of one fundamental law of life—the great law of "No work, no wages!"

We sometimes hear the complaint, "Oh, I have no luck; every thing you do seems to prosper, but all I do, goes wrong!" Not so; the law is, you must work if you wish for wages. Life is not to be trifled with, it deals in no chances, no good luck, but in *certainties* only. The great wheels revolve invisibly, slowly, but just as surely, just as inevitably as machinery. The laws of nature, the sure sunrise, the sure sunset, winter and summer are not more unchanging than the great laws of life, which, whoso will, can read. Life deals with certainties only: and the harvest doth not roll its great golden waves in the West winds of Autumn, unless the seed were sown months ago in the Spring.

In the city this is not so: there are more fluctuating waves in the current of life. Men grow suddenly rich, or poor; property doubles in value, or it becomes worthless. A prosperous adventure, a bold speculation—Lord Timothy Dexter's "warming-pan voyage to the West Indies," a rise in stocks—all these may bring fortune, as well as a life of prudent industry; and, although my settled conviction is that all these even are the results of invariable laws, not of what we without reflection call chance or luck, yet the proofs are not so obvious, the great chain and sequence of cause and effect is not so easy to understand as here in the country.

On the contrary, how intelligible are the lessons of prudence, of foresight, of thoughtfulness, which the farmer's life teaches him. No day but brings its duty, no season but brings its necessary labor. The farmer does not talk of luck or chance, or believe that a fortunate rise in stocks will fill his barns. The seed *must* be sown—but that is not all; nature never gambles; she has taught him that she never deals in chances; the seed *must* be good—the ground *must* be ploughed. He may manure his land well or ill, but he knows there is no chance about it;—unless he manures his fields, they tell him we have no good luck for you; real estate may rise without manure, but corn will *not*.

The corn must be cultivated too, and weeded, and cared for, stocks and merchandise may increase in value without your labor, the root of all evil may grow without cultivation—no other root but weeds only will—and whether that is not a very noxious and dangerous weed, is a question about which there are many opinions. This is but one illustration; consider in how many forms these lessons are repeated to you in your daily life; consider of how many prudent virtues they are the necessary foundation.

Do they not teach you also that the same laws regulate your social position, your moral being? If you neglect your duties to your neighbors, do you hope to have their esteem? If your life is a daily routine of dishonesty, do you expect to be in good repute? If your life is immoral and dissipated, does it not wear away yourself, your name, your mind, and your moral nature?

Daily, almost hourly, even in the city, although repeated in more doubtful and difficult language, do I see new proofs of that other, but similar law—an opportunity never comes back again. But in the country this is always before you. Does the seed-time come back again ever? Can you ever put off until to-morrow the duty of to-day? Were I to sum this all up in one word, there is but one which I know comprehensive enough to embrace it all, and that is indeed a word full of meaning—labor! "Thou shalt labor" is the commandment which life daily repeats to us. Every man has his task set before him, and the duty of patient, thoughtful labor is his blessing; or, neglected, it becomes his bane. Let us reason together upon this subject, and we shall find that there is in all this the deepest cause for gratitude. It is an answer also to those complaints of which I spoke—those grumbling complaints, so unworthy of a true man. How often do you hear it said, how often, too, do you repeat it,—"Oh! my farm is poor, this New England soil is barren, the West is the only place for farmers!" or, "I am too poor to farm to advantage," or, "my education was neglected. I cannot go ahead and better my condition, like my neighbor so and so,"—or worst of all, "I have no luck, every thing has turned against me." All this is false, unspeakably false. These are not the lessons of living, grumble them hourly if you will, sit sulking like a child in the corner, and let the world go by you if you will; but these are not true; on the contrary there is no New England farmer, who reflects, who really

does his *own thinking*, but thanks God daily that his heritage is given to him here in this cold clime; on this soil which yields to labor only, rewards labor only. A true man does not grumble because he was not born with a golden spoon in his mouth; he knows that gold is a *soft* metal and does not wear well—iron is better. There is no one here to-day who is *any thing*, who has *made* himself any thing, who feels that he is a living, real man—who does not in his heart of hearts thank Heaven that he was not born rich.

How false and shallow is this complaint of one's lot in life, this complaint of our toils and labors. The exact truth is, that the primal curse, as we call it, "in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread," is a blessing in disguise, perhaps the highest blessing. This is the real and earnest belief of our age: the age of iron is passed, and the age of gold is passing away: the age of labor is coming; already we speak of the dignity of labor, and that phrase is any thing but an idle and unmeaning one; it is a true gospel to the man who takes in its full meaning; the nation that understands it is free, and independent, and great. The dignity of labor is but another name for liberty. The chivalry of labor is now the battle cry of the old world, and the new. We hear it from England, great, brave old England; sometimes, too, though more faintly and doubtfully, from sorrowful, struggling Italy. Cherish these brave thoughts, then, in your hearts; let those noble words, the dignity of labor, be your battle cry, as you fight the battle of life. The age proclaims these truths at last; but nature, the green fields, the waving harvests, proclaimed them long ago. Ask your cornfields to what mysterious power they do homage and pay tribute, and they will answer, to labor. In a thousand forms nature repeats the truth, that the laborer alone is what we call respectable—is alone worthy of praise and honors, and rewards. In other years, men paid almost divine honors to the successful heroes, in their bloody wars; the soldiers returned home in stately procession, and triumphal arches were built in their honor, with silken banners fluttering from their sides, and bright garlands adorning their sculptured stones. These splendid structures were the tribute which man in those by-gone days paid to the victorious soldier; but nature does honor to her peaceful soldier still, and as every

humble laborer seeks his home at nightfall, a more majestic arch of triumph soars above him, and he marches bravely forward, conscious of a day of duty, and of successful toil, under that eternal arch, which was builded when the foundations of the great deep were laid. The sunset flings silken banners of crimson and gold along its stately sides, and the constellations from its deep blue vaults hang garlands there, in clusters of those holy stars which are the perennial flowers of heaven.

Our fathers had this lesson of life, this lesson of self-respect, this lesson of the value, the nobility, the dignity of labor, taught to them in earnest long ago. The wide ocean divided them from royal power, and from the bonds of wealth and rank and custom; the woods and the forests taught them to work if they would live; taught them, too, that the man who changed the wild-wood and the dreary marsh to happy home, had done *something*, was a *man*, was better and more to be respected than the rich man, who might purchase or inherit it; taught them that the tangled bushes and the rank weeds and the grey moss would grow over the man who did not work—taught them that the man who could rule his farm, could rule himself; and, finally, when they came to open their eyes and look into the matter, taught them all at once that they were the real kings, and had been kings all the while, not somebody's son over the sea.

This was the democracy which nature then taught to them, and repeats to us to-day. I love to remember what naturalists have told us, that the symbol of industry, the "busy bee," was unknown to America before our Fathers came here. The Indians called it the "fly of the English," and learned to dread its approach. Even now, in the western prairies, the bee is the scout and the pioneer of civilization.

Let us complain no more, then, of labor and toil; let us talk no more of disadvantages and opportunities and poverty, and self-made men. The man who does not labor has no right here; he is in the way, the busy world crowds him out of the path; opportunities and advantages are all around us, but they are for the men who wake up, and open their eyes in the morning, not for fops and sluggards. To be born poor is a blessing, not a curse; the only real poverty is inside the man, not outside, and all men who are made at all, are self-made men. Schools are good tools, and col-

leges and books, but they must have men, not children to use them. There is one great true book written by the finger of God, and its pages are opened all around us, of which those other books are after all only poor and partial translations; the true book is written as of old, on tables of stone, written not in ink, but in letters of light, and the wide sky, and the wonderful ocean, and the mysterious forests, and the green, cool meadows, and the dreaming flowers, and bird, and tree, and man, are its living pictures and illuminations. This, then, is your birthright, and your inheritance; not a life of wealth, and ease, and repose, but a life of brave toil and trust. Accept this heritage with joy and gladness, work while it is yet day. Let your life be like the tree, which pauses not in its climbing, until it has reached its ordained height,—the tree which, although rooted in the dark, cold ground, struggles towards the light, and stretches out its great limbs, tossing and striving upwards, towards the sky. Take this thought with you, but take it in better words than mine—in the words of our noble American poet, Longfellow, whose great true thoughts have found fit utterance in a psalm, a real psalm of life —a fit poem for America:

Life is real, life is earnest,
And the grave is not its goal,
Dust thou art, to dust returnest,
Was not spoken of the soul.

Let us then be up and doing,
With a heart for any fate,
Still achieving, still pursuing,
Learn to labor and to wait.

But this rural life does not deal in utility alone, or in the practical teachings of life and duty only, it has its lessons for the heart, its influences upon the affections, its sweet, kindly story of home. It seems a paradox to say that you separate men by uniting them, and yet it is true. In the country you live on your farm, and you have neighbors, though they live half a mile away. In the city you live in a block, and you know not even the name of the family at your next door. In the country, nature, by constant laws, teaches that you are not sufficient for yourself alone. You are dependent on your neighbors in a thousand ways, you need friendship and sympathy. You must borrow and lend, you must

help and be helped. In sickness and health, in sorrow and joy, in wealth and in poverty, there must be a perpetual interchange of good offices.

As we turn over the leaves of this wondrous book, there is one page in which are inscribed the loftiest thoughts, the noblest lessons, the most beauteous pictures of life. There is one word which sounds and swells with universal music to every heart—a music of fears and hopes, of memories, of joys and sorrows, the one old dear word of "Home!" How many thoughts cling and cluster around it. How many memories rush unbidden with the word—of the past as well as of the present—of those early days which we would fain recall, of that old house in the country which we loved so well, of those green shadows which have passed away —those vanished shadows, and the children playing in the shadows, which we can see far off, as if in some beautiful dream. The light that is not on the land or sea, lingers always around those hours, and hallows them forever.

Who is there among you who does not recall the picture of a happy New England home, seen from the highway, as we journey along at eventide; or seen in the sweet, sacred memories of other years. You seem to feel the hush of peace and repose, which dwell beneath the drooping elm trees that shade and guard the door. The last rays of the sunset are fading in dissolving beauty in the West, and in their soft light you can see the farmer who, by his thoughtful labor, has well earned his repose. He is resting there in the wide porch, looking out over his well tilled fields, watching the last fading traces of the sunset, the first trembling beams of the evening star, as he will watch one day for another sunset, and for another evening star, and will know that it is his morning star also. Beside him is the wife and mother—for what would be the picture of a home if woman's sweet influence and empire were forgotten? We should miss the flame on the altar, the fire on the hearth, the angel in the house, if her form were wanting there. Flowers are growing in the shelter of the porch, but fairer flowers are blooming in the shelter of that quiet home. Her daughters are with her, not languid and pale, but as fresh and modest as the dewy rosebuds, half opening by the porch. On the grass, a little apart, the boys are gathered;—a little apart, for with a growing sense of manli-

ness they are beginning to separate themselves, and lay their own plans for the future, studying out what independence means—and over all bends God's beautiful sky ; over them all flows softly that deep blue boundless river, which we call eternity.

As a contrast with all this, think of the homes of the poor in the city. The country spreads a tender, kindly grace over even the home of poverty ; the green trees wave gently over the ruinous cottage ; the green moss conceals and adorns its decay ; the wild rose and the soft-eyed violet grow on the grassy bank. But in the city, the poor live in narrow, squalid rooms, where the sunshine can never bring in its blessing.

We build stately churches, and endow costly hospitals, but the homes of the poor are always the city's shame. I must not now dwell upon that subject. It is the great reform which the hour demands, the reform which we must make, or it will be made one day in a rough, wild way—demanded by justice, by charity, by policy, by the love of our country. But I turn to a fairer picture.

A southern friend said to me lately, I have been in every State of our Union, but there is nothing so beautiful after all as a New England village. There is an air of refinement and good taste about the houses and gardens, a certain neatness and propriety, which is seen in no other part of the country. I confess that this flattery is very pleasing, for it is significant of many things. This wish to adorn our homes is a silent recognition of the truth, that there is something more than mere use and thrift in the minds of our people. The house is not a shelter only from the seasons ; it is the temple and altar of our affections.

Near the ancient dwelling-place of the Natick Indians there is an old farm-house, with two vast, majestic elms before it, of which a significant story is told. When the Puritan preacher in those by-gone days settled there on that green slope by the river Charles, he conciliated the natives by his sympathy and kindness, and soon taught them to love and respect him. He had lived there but a few months, when the Indians brought two young elm trees from the forest, and with much form and solemnity, planted them before his door. He asked their meaning, and they told him that they were "trees of peace." These trees of peace were only slender saplings then, which a child could carry in his hand, but they have grown to be monumental trees, venerable in their

majestic beauty. The Puritan settler, stern but kindly, the red men, with their dark, unfathomable eyes, have vanished away, and rest beneath their shade no more; the old house is fast falling to decay; the trees, too, will fade and fall some day, but those old, simple words have a more enduring life. I never look upon those trees, but the words "trees of peace," return again with sweet, soothing music. Yes, those words have their own natural music, and will not leave off their singing. Trees of peace! Can you not see those vast grey, gigantic arms stretching out over the roof-tree to shelter and protect that quiet home—dropping down their rich clusters of green leaves, and waving them to and fro with soft music in the sweet sunshine?—dropping down their deep shadows on the soft turf? Can you not look back to those old days, and see the young children playing in the grass; and the wild flowers playing like children in the shadows? Those shadows seem deeper, and the green turf seems softer for those old simple words of promise, and I have come at last to feel that every man who plants an elm tree to shelter and adorn the home of his affections, the home of wife and child, plants a "tree of peace there." The Indian still sends it from out the wild woodlands; the sweet sunshine and the quiet shadows promise him peace and rest beneath its shade.

There is still left to us all, an inherited memory of that antique Hebrew feeling of the sweetness of repose, under one's own vine and fig-tree, of that deep and intense feeling of repose which the children of Israel, exiles and aliens in Egypt, the wanderers for forty years in the grey, weary desert, might well feel when, amid the green hills and forests of Judea, they could find rest at last for their travel-worn feet, could leave their folded tents, and make themselves homes at last in that land—then so beautiful and fair. We inherit something of that old, deep feeling, for we too, must in some way be exiles and wanderers before we find repose, and the drooping elm tree at the door, the dewy rose-bush at the window of home, the fragrant honey-suckle at the porch, all are "trees of peace!"

This rural life does not teach industry solely, nor cultivate the affections alone, it appeals to all our higher faculties, it refines and elevates, it teaches us that there is a beauty in flower and tree, in sunshine and shadow, and in the waving bough, in the golden green light of the woods and meadows, and in the great wild woodlands, which was not bestowed without purpose, nor in vain.

We read in that old cherished book, "Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress," how Christian, as he journeyed, "lifted up his eyes and behold there was a very stately palace before him, the name of which was 'Beautiful,' and it stood by the high-way side." As we too journey on in life's pilgrimage, that stately palace rises before us in its hushed and solemn beauty; it stands now as of old by the highway-side, and its lofty portals are thrown open wide, that whoso will, may enter there.

We go to the city to study the picture gallery, when every window we look from gives us a picture, which, if we would but study it, mocks the painter's poor imitation, a picture which was never, and can never be painted. Every tree, every green shrub, every graceful bough, as it waves in the sunshine, will give lessons in coloring and form which laugh at the artist's brush. We go to Italy, to see the beauties and wonders, and mysteries of another age, while around us lies the true Italy which we should study. One of the most wonderful monuments of Rome is a stately obelisk, which has its own strange history. Far back in the dawn of time it sojourned in Egypt. In the sacred City of the Sun it lifted its red granite shaft, pointing beyond the earth, beyond the stars, the silent witness of the splendor and decay of mighty empires, now lost in oblivion. When imperial Rome sent her iron legions beyond the pyramids, they brought this wondrous column to Italy, as the proudest trophy of their conquests. No ordinary power was worthy to bear such a costly gift to Rome. The sacred Nile itself was turned from its channel, and sought it far away amid the silence of the sands—sought it in its home in the ancient City of the Sun, and bore the heavy burden to the Mediterranean; the sorrowful tribute paid to the Tiber by the conquered Nile. It was carried in festal triumph to the seven-hilled city, as the very seal of her imperial splendor, but it bore its own dark omens and evil destiny with it, over the blue Mediterranean, and became only the prophetic witness of Rome's decay. Now, as of old, it stands amid ancient ruins, the chronicle of a vanished religion, a buried civilization. Its tapering sides are carved with hieroglyphics, which record the history of ancient dynasties, the wars, the conquests of Egypt's forgotten kings. At its feet is buried all that made Rome great in those old days of valor and conquest,

of power, and pride, and splendor. Now, as of old, it stands in a sacred city, unchanged, while all around it is changed, the same mysterious and impressive monument of man's greatness and man's decay. No, not unchanged, for that dark obelisk of Egypt has forgotten its ancient worship of the sun, has renounced its allegiance to the departed gods of Rome, and now it points serene and calm to heaven, lifting far up in the blue vaulted sky the sacred symbol of the cross.

We leave our homes and journey to Italy to study there the lessons of history, of art, the wisdom and the beauty of a vanished age: but we have before us always, monuments more ancient, more impressive, and more beautiful than Rome can show. The humble grass which we trample daily under our feet can reveal a history more ancient, and more strange, and secrets more marvellous. That slender elastic stem, which waves so gracefully in every breeze, which bends but breaks not even in the storm, is a tower builded atom by atom, not of red granite, like the obelisk, but of the purest emerald flint. Arch above arch, story above story, it lifts its cells and chambers from the dark earth, storing them as it rises, with its ripened sweetness. Winding channels, too, are formed, through which throb and flow hidden currents, as mysterious as our own vital blood; but their secrets are as yet undiscovered and unknown. The delicacy and the strength of that astonishing masonry laugh at the poor imitations of human skill. Is there an artisan so skilful who could build one of these wonderful cells, or frame one of these perfect arches, a painter so skilful, who on his pallet could mix and mingle the hues of that delicate emerald? The history of that structure is more ancient than obelisk or pyramid, for it dates back to that wonderful, unimaginable dawn, when God said—"Let the earth bring forth grass, and it was so." It has had its journeys, too, and migrations. From those pastoral plains of Central Asia, which were the ancient home of our race, the grass has followed man all over the globe, at once the pioneer and the proof of civilization—not as a monument of barbaric wars and triumphs, built only to decay, but of civilization, of humanity, and of progress; and the wild woods vanish before it, and the dark morass is changed to verdure as it journeys on. Like that obelisk of which I spoke, it was a worshipper of the sun, but it has never forgotten its consecration, nor renounced its alle-

giance. It is the faithful witness of the divine power which gave it birth, the unerring chronicle of His power and majesty. Its religion has never changed and can never vanish, but year after year it bears aloft the consecrated symbols of flower and seed—the flower that withers and fades, as life must fade, the seed that is the fruit of departing life, the pledge and promise of a resurrection. It has its own hieroglyphics too, inscribed upon it, not the records of bearded kings, but the secrets of life, the secrets of creation—mystic signs and symbols, the keys of which are lost to earth, and are read only in heaven. Ages upon ages ago it received the command to bring forth seed after its kind, and it has never forgotten its trust. Buried, like Egypt's wheat, with its mummy reaper for three thousand years, it never forgets its duty. No human power can make it produce aught from its tiny seed, excepting "after its kind;" and to-day it rears its beautiful shaft crowned with waving, graceful flowers and tasselled seed vessels, as of old. Do we know any thing, after all, of this slighted, unnoticed grass? Have you really read *one* of its mysteries? It grows from the seed, you say—but how, and why? What is hidden in that small shell, which brings forth this strange organization? Explain if you can, one mystery of its existence, one secret of its growth and change, one of the hidden sources of its beauty, its strength, and its usefulness to man, and then go to Italy if you will, to wonder at the obelisk which the sorrowful Nile sent to imperial Rome, and study its mysterious secrets.

This is but one example which I have selected, on account of its humility; but the world is overflowing with this wonder and mystery, which for want of another name we call beauty, and the beautiful. We see it in the fading sunset, the vanishing clouds, in the haunted shadows of the forest, in the delicate wild flowers, more beautiful and more rare, if we would but examine them, than our coarser garden flowers. It is heard in the sounds of the lonely wind, mourning among the pine boughs, in the music of the wandering brooks, in that morning concert of the birds, when in full orchestra, they welcome in the dawn, in the voice of the solitary thrush, singing alone amid the woods, in the deep quiet of noontide. The ancients in their beautiful fables symbolized this beauty, and told of nymphs who dwelt in the shadows, and who haunted the trees, the mountains, and the waters. That beauti-

ful fable has vanished, but the more beautiful reality remains. We hear every where voices from the spirit land, we recognize every where the footsteps of angels; all around lie those manifestations of Divine power which refine, and elevate, and purify.

One of England's true poets, Gerald Massey, who indeed learned in suffering, what he taught in song—himself a poor factory boy, educated by poverty, great by the aid of his struggles, sings thus in one of his "songs for the people:"

"Come from the den of darkness, and the city's soil of sin,
Put on your radiant manhood, and the Angel's blessing win,
Where wealthier sunlight comes from Heaven, like welcome smiles of God,
And earth's blind yearnings leap to life, in flowers from out the sod.
Come worship beauty in the forest dim and hush,
Where stands magnificence dreaming, and God burneth in the bush.
Or where the old hills worship with their silence for a psalm,
Or ocean's weary heart doth keep the Sabbath of its calm.
Come let us worship beauty with the knightly faith of old.
O, chivalry of labor, toiling for the age of Gold."

I am well aware that such thoughts as these are not the daily companions of our farmers, the hourly emotions of all who dwell in the country. The farmer who hoes his corn does not spare the wild weed which grows there on account of its beauty, nor when he is hurrying to save his hay does he watch the sublime beauty of the rolling thunder cloud, but whoever looks down from his lofty pinnacle of self complacency, upon our plain country people, and believes they do not study, do not reflect, do not appreciate what is beautiful and sublime, do not appreciate the great truth that all this beauty was not created without an object, do not refine and cultivate their hearts and brains by the study of it, knows nothing of the hearts of our people, knows nothing of life and its lessons. There are churls, to be sure, who care nothing but for their fields and crops, who think only of manure, and pigs, and potatoes, but they are not representatives (thank Heaven) of our New England farmer.

There is a wild German story of the adventures of the student Anselmus, in which it is related how an old magician shut him up in a glass bottle and placed it upon a shelf in his study. Poor Anselmus was unhappy enough in his narrow quarters; but he was not alone; he found on the shelf beside him, other students; —Cross Church scholars and law clerks, shut up in bottles too,

like him, but unlike him they were unconscious of their confinement, and thought themselves all the while enjoying life, drinking double beer and singing like true students "Guadiamus igitur." There is much significance in that story; many men are shut up in bottles, and all the while are unconscious of it. You can laugh to yourselves, no doubt, and think of many of your neighbors besides the drunkards, who live shut up in their own glass bottles, living regardless of all the duties of life, selfish churls without friendships or affections, who can never grow better or wiser, or more kindly, but only a little more selfish and cold as they grow older. Let them remain there; the country will have no useful influences for them. They would barter their birthright in the stars, and exchange all that sweet, holy beauty for a single tallow candle to light their gloomy dens. They would rob the sunset clouds of their gold, if it would but make a little dollar for their pockets. Every rose bush would bear thorns only, and not flowers, could they but make the laws of creation. Such churls are not good men, nor good farmers either.

Nature hates a churl and a miser; his fields are traitors to him, his crops rebel against him, his fruits fail him. It is but another illustration of the doctrine, "No work, no wages!" A farmer who thinks only of himself, of crops and of money, and forgets the duties of man, of life, and home, is false to himself, because he is true to himself alone; and by the sure, slow, certain, and inevitable laws of life, his fields and his farm will betray him, and be false to him also. But I repeat it, these are not the representatives of our farmers, nor the results of rural life.

I have often noticed this general difference, that in the country men reflect more, are more conservative and thoughtful. In the city, men live by the railroad, and the telegraph; the morning newspaper thinks for them; the excitement of to-day is forgotten in to-morrow's news; they do business by steam and electricity, and decide on the spur of the moment; they are all *fast* men. But in the country there is more reflection and thought. The deep pastoral solitudes have their uses, and their profound instructions. There is always food for thought here. In the city, if we pause and step aside from the current, and shut our ears to the rush and roar of life, we see only the works of man—not the beautiful, the elevating and refining works of God. Even at

night, when we creep home through the streets, tired and worn, if we look up at the holy stars, there come to us weary hopes and despondencies, which are not to be spoken or cherished—longings and sorrows and memories, which are all to be put aside and forgotten.

But in the country you are surrounded with wonder, and mystery, and beauty; you cannot escape them, they follow you into the dark shadows of the wood, they are beneath your feet, although you trample upon them, they cluster around you as you stop to rest. A very learned friend was speaking to me lately of the modern scepticism as to miracles, and the ingenious doubts and speculations of science, which disturb the ancient faith of so many minds. I plucked the white clover blossom at my feet, and replied, "I need no higher miracle than that." Yes, that is the only miracle we need; tell us how, century after century, this humble flower has perpetuated its mysterious birth and growth, tell us why the seed has kept its plighted faith to the Spring, and year after year has blossomed always the same, tell us who taught it to seek out in the dark ground, or in the invisible air, that subtle food which it turns into its own substance. Tell us how this plant, which we call lifeless and inanimate, can produce from its own being that mysterious seed which man's wonderful brain not only cannot imitate, but cannot even understand in its laws, its structure, or its creation; and we will then talk of other miracles, and discuss probabilities; until then we need no higher miracles. How true is it that this world is full of miracles, full of teachers, who are all inspired; and when the sweet season of Pentecost comes, in its green beauty, they speak as of old, with tongues of fire.

Listen then to these voices, learn those psalms of life; let them instruct you in the dignity of labor and the duties of living; let them teach you by the serene, silent influences of beauty; let them steal gently into your hearts, and shape your lives by their sweetness and by their sympathy—for those voices of life and nature are not given without purpose nor in vain; they are the angel songs, which are sung on earth and in the sky: they are the sacred oracles of heaven.

Will you go higher than the farm, its uses, its thrift, its laws of labor—or than the home, with its affections, its duties? The

way is easy, and the path is open; the landscape widens as we climb the hill, the air is purer, and the vision more clear. This great book which we call rural life, country, nature, is a beautiful story which has no ending, its pages unfold ever new mysteries; the loftiest genius finds information and instruction and inspiration there; the highest intellect comes there to learn. It gives you the "thoughts which lie too deep for tears," the sunshine, and the glory which is brighter than the sun. In this marvellous book of life, there is inscribed on every page, Excelsior! Eternal progress is the last and loftiest law of nature; taught by the tender flowers which leave the dark cold ground and seek the sweet sunshine, unfolding their delicate beauty towards the heavens; taught by the trees which lift their green columns aloft, and from the topmost limb that looks up at the sky, point always higher; taught by the never resting winds, which wander past the lonely mountain peaks; taught by the mountains, which lift away their grey cliffs above the clouds, and stay their starry soaring only when they have linked the earth and the sky together—until, as you gaze on their aerial summits, heaven seems nearer and eternity more sure. Astronomers tell us, that it is written in the wondrous ordinances of heaven, that the stars shall change their places in the long lapses of time. The constellations which are now visible in our northern latitudes will disappear below the horizon, and other stars will fill their places. Belted Orion, and the white light of Sirius, and the sweet influences of the Pleiades will pass away, and the Southern Cross, now seen only from the Land of Palms, will arise in its mysterious beauty to shed its tender, trembling radiance upon our midnight sky. Yes, even in the stars, which we call fixed, there is endless change and progress. Let us learn from them that highest lesson, and let us seek to make our lives like the star that hasteth never—resteth never—but still moves onward in its appointed way. We need not to wait for another dawn, for another life—we need not wait until we pass the mountain and the river—we are on the mountain now; look up, the river is flowing noiselessly over our heads, and—

"From the sky serene and far,
A voice falls like the falling star,
Excelsior."