

AGRICULTURE OF MASSACHUSETTS.

IN an afternoon in April, after a long walk, I traversed an orchard where two boys were grafting apple trees, and found the Farmer in his corn field. He was holding the plough, and his son driving the oxen. This man always impresses me with respect, he is so manly, so sweet-tempered, so faithful, so disdainful of all appearances, excellent and reverable in his old weather-worn cap and blue frock be-daubed with the soil of the field, so honest withal, that he always needs to be watched lest he should cheat himself. I still remember with some shame, that in some dealing we had together a long time ago, I found that he had been looking to my interest in the affair, and I had been looking to my interest, and nobody had looked to his part. As I drew near this brave laborer in the midst of his own acres, I could not help feeling for him the highest respect. Here is the Cæsar, the Alexander of the soil, conquering and to conquer, after how many and many a hard-fought summer's day and winter's day, not like Napoleon hero of sixty battles only, but of six thousand, and out of every one he has come victor; and here he stands, with Atlantic strength and cheer, invincible still. These slight and useless city-limbs of ours will come to shame before this strong soldier,

for his have done their own work and ours too. What good this man has, or has had, he has earned. No rich father or father-in-law left him any inheritance of land or money. He borrowed the money with which he bought his farm, and has bred up a large family, given them a good education, and improved his land in every way year by year, and this without prejudice to himself the landlord, for here he is, a man every inch of him, and reminds us of the hero of the Robinhood ballad,

“Much, the miller’s son,
There was no inch of his body
But it was worth a groom.”

Innocence and justice have written their names on his brow. Toil has not broken his spirit. His laugh rings with the sweetness and hilarity of a child; yet he is a man of a strongly intellectual taste, of much reading, and of an erect good sense and independent spirit which can neither brook usurpation nor falsehood in any shape. I walked up and down, the field, as he ploughed his furrow, and we talked as we walked. Our conversation naturally turned on the season and its new labors. He had been reading the Report of the Agricultural Survey of the Commonwealth, and had found good things in it; but it was easy to see that he felt towards the author much as soldiers do towards the historiographer who follows the camp, more good nature than reverence for the gownsman.

The First Report, he said, is better than the last, as I observe the first sermon of a minister is often his best, for every man has one thing which he specially wishes to say, and that comes out at first. But who is this book written for? Not for farmers; no pains are taken to send it to them; it was by accident that this copy came into my hands for a few days. And it is not for them. They could not afford to follow such advice as is given here; they have sterner teachers; their own business teaches them better. No; this was written for the literary men. But in that case, the State should not be taxed to pay for it. Let us see. The account of the maple sugar,—that is very good and entertaining, and, I suppose, true. The story of the farmer’s daughter, whom education had spoiled for everything useful on a farm,—that is good too,

and we have much that is like it in Thomas’s Almanack. But why this recommendation of stone houses? They are not so cheap, not so dry, and not so fit for us. Our roads are always changing their direction, and after a man has built at great cost a stone house, a new road is opened, and he finds himself a mile or two from the highway. Then our people are not stationary, like those of old countries, but always alert to better themselves, and will remove from town to town as a new market opens, or a better farm is to be had, and do not wish to spend too much on their buildings.

The Commissioner advises the farmers to sell their cattle and their hay in the fall, and buy again in the spring. But we farmers always know what our interest dictates, and do accordingly. We have no choice in this matter; our way is but too plain. Down below, where manure is cheap, and hay dear, they will sell their oxen in November; but for me to sell my cattle and my produce in the fall, would be to sell my farm, for I should have no manure to renew a crop in the spring. And thus Necessity farms it, necessity finds out when to go to Brighton, and when to feed in the stall, better than Mr. Colman can tell us.

But especially observe what is said throughout these Reports of the model farms and model farmers. One would think that Mr. D. and Major S. were the pillars of the Commonwealth. The good Commissioner takes off his hat when he approaches them, distrusts the value of “his feeble praise,” and repeats his compliments as often as their names are introduced. And yet, in my opinion, Mr. D. with all his knowledge and present skill, would starve in two years on any one of fifty poor farms in this neighborhood, on each of which now a farmer manages to get a good living. Mr. D. inherited a farm, and spends on it every year from other resources; otherwise his farm had ruined him long since;—and as for the Major he never got rich by his skill in making land produce, but by his skill in making men produce. The truth is, a farm will not make an honest man rich in money. I do not know of a single instance, in which a man has honestly got rich by farming alone. It cannot be done. The way in which men who have farms grow rich, is either by other resources; or by trade; or by getting their labor for nothing; or by

other methods of which I could tell you many sad anecdotes. What does the Agricultural Surveyor know of all this? What can he know? He is the victim of the "Reports," that are sent him of particular farms. He cannot go behind the estimates to know how the contracts were made, and how the sales were effected. The true men of skill, the poor farmers who by the sweat of their face, without an inheritance, and without offence to their conscience, have reared a family of valuable citizens and matrons to the state, reduced a stubborn soil to a good farm, although their buildings are many of them shabby, are the only right subjects of this Report; yet these make no figure in it. These should be holden up to imitation, and their methods detailed; yet their houses are very uninviting and unobtrusive to State Commissioners. So with these premiums to Farms, and premiums to Cattle Shows. The class that I describe, must pay the premium which is awarded to the rich. Yet the premium obviously ought to be given for the good management of a poor farm.

In this strain the Farmer proceeded, adding many special criticisms. He had a good opinion of the Surveyor, and acquitted him of any blame in the matter, but was incorrigible in his skepticism concerning the benefits conferred by legislatures on the agriculture of Massachusetts. I believe that my friend is a little stiff and inconvertible in his own opinions, and that there is another side to be heard; but so much wisdom seemed to lie under his statement, that it deserved a record.
