AMOS ALCOTT

TABLETS

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Tablets

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Содержание

Amos Bronson Alcott
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BOOK I
PRACTICAL

"Philosophy, the formatrix of judgment and manners, has the privilege of having a hand in everything." – Montaigne.

I
THE GARDEN

"If Eden be on earth at all,
'Tis that which we the country call."

Henry Vaughan.

THE GARDEN

i. – antiquity

"I never had any desire so strong and so like to covetousness," says Cowley, "as that one which I have had always that I might be master at last of a small house and ample garden, with very moderate conveniences joined to them, and there to dedicate the remainder of my life to the culture of them and the study of nature. Virgil's first wish was to be a wise man, the second to be a good husbandman. But since nature denies to most men the capacity or appetite, and fortune allows but to very few the opportunities or possibility of applying themselves wholly to wisdom, the best mixture of human affairs we can make, are the employments of a country life. It is, as Columella calls it, the nearest neighbor or next in kindred to philosophy. And Varro says the principles of it are the same which Ennius made to be the principles of all nature; earth, water, air, and the sun. There is no other sort of life that affords so many branches of praise to a panegyrist; the utility of it to a man's self, the usefulness or rather necessity of it to all the rest of mankind, the innocence, the pleasure, the antiquity, the dignity."

This wish of the poet's appears to be nearly universal. Almost every one is drawn to the country, and takes pleasure in rural pursuits. The citizen hopes to become a countryman, and contrives to secure his cottage or villa, unless he fail by some reverse of fortune or of character. 'Tis man's natural position, the Paradise designed for him, and wherein he is placed originally in the Sacred Books of the cultivated peoples; their first man being conceived a gardener and countryman by inspiration as by choice.

Gardens and orchards plant themselves by sympathy about our dwellings, as if their seeds were preserved in us by inheritance. They distinguish Man properly from the forester and hunter. The country, as discriminated from the woods, is of man's creation. The savage has no country. Nor are farms and shops, trade, cities, but civilization in passing and formation. Civilization begins with persons, ideas; the garden and orchard showing the place of their occupants in the scale; these dotting the earth with symbols of civility wherever they ornament its face. Thus by mingling his mind with nature, and so transforming the landscape into his essence, Man generates the homestead, and opens a country to civilization and the arts.

In like manner, are the woods meliorated and made ours. Melancholy and morose, standing in their loneliness, we trim them into keeping with our wishes and so adopt them into our good graces, as ornaments of our estates, heraldries of our gentility.

Our human history neither opens in forests nor in cities, but in gardens and orchards whose mythologies are woven into the faith of our race; the poets having made these their chosen themes from the beginning. And we turn, as with emotions of country and consanguinity to the classic pictures

of the Paradise, "planted by the Lord God eastward in Eden, and wherein he put the man, whom he had formed to dress and keep it;" where,

"Out of the fertile ground he caused to grow
All trees of noblest kind for sight, smell, taste;
Groves whose rich trees wept odorous gums and balms,
Others whose fruit, burnished with golden rind,
Hung amiable, —
Flowers of all hue, and without thorn the rose;" —

to this; or, of scarce inferior fame, to the gardens of the Hesperides with their golden apples; – or, to those other

" – gardens feigned
Or of revived Adonis, or renowned Alcinous,"

whereof Homer sings:

"Without the hall and close upon the gate
A goodly orchard ground was situate
Of near ten acres, about which was led
A lofty quickset. In it flourished
High and broad fruit trees that pomegranates bore;
Sweet figs, pears, olives, and a number more
Most useful plants did there produce their store,
Whose fruits the hardest winter could not kill,
Nor hottest summers wither. There was still
Fruit in his proper season; all the year
Sweet zephyr breathed upon them blasts that were
Of varied tempers: these, he made to bear
Ripe fruits; these blossoms; pear grew after pear,
Apple succeeded apple, grape the grape,
Fig after fig; Time made never rape
Of any dainty there. A sprightly vine
Spread here her roots, whose fruit a hot sunshine
Made ripe betimes; there grew another green,
Here some were gathering; here some pressing seen;
A large allotted several each fruit had,
And all th' adorn'd grounds their appearance made
In flower and fruit."

Or again to those preferred by the royal guest of Solomon above all other splendors of his court,

"Though she on silver floors did tread,
With bright Assyrian carpets on them spread,
To hide the metal's poverty;
Though she looked up to roofs of gold,
And naught around her could behold
But silk and rich embroidery,

And Babylonian tapestry,
And wealthy Hiram's princely dye;
Tho' Ophir's starry stones met everywhere her eye,
Though she herself and her gay host were drest
With all the shining glories of the East, —
When lavish art her costly work had done,
The honor and the prize of bravery
Was by the garden from the palace won;
And every rose and lily there did stand
Better attired by nature's hand;
The case thus judged against the king you see,
By one that would not be so rich, though wiser far than he."

So the orchard of Academus suggests the ripest wisdom and most elegant learning of accomplished Greece.

Thus we associate gardens and orchards with the perfect condition of mankind. Gardeners ourselves by birthright, we also mythologize and plant our Edens in the East of us, like our ancestors; the sacredness of earth and heaven still clinging to the tiller of the ground. Him we esteem the pattern man, the most favored of any. His labors have a charming innocency. They yield the gains of a self-respect denied to other callings. His is an occupation friendly to every virtue; the freest of any from covetousness and debasing cares. It is full of honest profits, manly labors, and brings and administers all necessaries; gives the largest leisure for study and recreation, while it answers most tenderly the hospitalities of friendship and the claims of home. The delight of children, the pastime of woman, the privilege of the poor man, as it is the ornament of the gentleman, the praise of the scholar, the security of the citizen, it places man in his truest relations to the world in which he lives. And he who is insensible to these pleasures, must lack some chord in the harp of humanity, worshipping, if he worship, at some strange shrine.

Who loves a garden still his Eden keeps;
Perennial pleasures plants, and wholesome harvests reaps.

ii. – ornaments

In laying out a garden there must be protection from the north winds, and if the hills are wooded thus much is gained for profit as for ornament. Every homestead supposes a wood-lot and forest paths for walking and meditation. So the garden claims some shading down from pasture fields and the wilder scenery skirting it. The orchard is an improvement on the garden, and holds a nobler relation to the house and its occupants. Without suitable ornaments and enclosures, these must be set to the side of the farm solely, not to the house, humanity, nor art. Eyes and feet have their claims along with the hands upon the landscape, beauty and convenience having one mind concerning the best ways of dealing with it. It is clear that art has an interest, and should have its hand, in a good well, wholesome cellar, as in the fertility of the soil, the modesty of the grasses and shrubbery. Alleys are best determined by the nature of the grounds. They have a picturesque effect; so have gates, especially when they open into a wood, or are seen in perspective at the end of an avenue or a lane. Winding paths give pleasing surprises, if accommodated to the grounds, take us by the most attractive route; slopes, swells, irregularities of surface, heightening the pleasure attending the prospect. There are spots, too, that plead for their clump of trees, for a single one, for an alcove, an arbor, a conservatory,

for a fence, – structure of some sort, be it ever so plain – and these once there, please the eye as if grown there.

Arbors are especially ornamental. No country residence is furnished without the embellishment of a summer-house. It may be constructed of the simplest stuff grown near at hand in the woods. For one shall not range far in that direction without falling soon upon every curve in the geometry of beauty, as if nature designing to surprise him anticipated his coming, and had grown his materials in the underwood along the lines especially of ancient fence rows, where young pines bent by the lopping of the axe, snow falls, or other accident, in seeking to recover their rectitude, describe every graceful form of curve or spiral suited to his rustic works. These may be combined in ways wonderfully varied; and the pleasure attending the working them into a shapely whole, has charms akin to the composing of poems and pictures. There is a delight, too, in surprising these stags of the woods in their coverts, of which only artists can speak.

Neath hemlocks dark and whispering pines,
Wandering he loiters curiously,
The forest Muse her searching sense combines
To range the shades their cunning curves to see —
Brackets grotesque, strange gnarled things,
Wreathed rails and balusters in twisted pairs,
Rhyming their rival coils for sportful stairs;
Scrolls, antlers, volutes – full-armed he brings
His fagot sheaf of spoils, and binds;
While frolic fancy sylvan serpents finds,
And Druid lyres for poet's pleasance strings.

Then for rainy days, one has the choice of books, pen, or handicraft, to vary his pleasures. There is a charm in using tools to him who has cunning in his hands for converting woods to ornamental uses, – the simplest, roughest sticks even, – in setting trellises, hurdles, espaliers for vines,

" – auxiliary poles for hops,
Ascending spiral, ranged in meet array;"

in making or mending articles and implements of any kind, for house or grounds, to be objects of interest whenever he views them afterwards.

The eyes have a property in things and territories not named in any title deeds, and are the owners of our choicest possessions. Nor do we dwell in this emblematic world, and call it ours, any part of it, without using them: that is ours which they have assisted the hands in creating. Nature sketches rudely the outlines of her plans on the landscape; 'tis the artist's privilege to fill out and finish these draughts, improving upon her suggestions. Nor is there a spot which does not kindly take ornament, as if its canvas were spread awaiting the finishing touches. And had he a thousand hands, uninterrupted leisure, the taste and genius, what pleasure were comparable to that of devoting them to drawing lines thereon which shall survive him, to enrich every eye beholding them, though it were only in passing! So a good man impresses his image on the landscape he improves, and imparts qualities that perpetuate its occupant to after times.

iii. – pleasures

"Days may conclude with nights, and suns may rest

As dead within the west,
Yet the next morn regilds the fragrant east."

I know not how it is with others, to me the spring's invitations are irresistible. I may be scholarly inclined, and my tasks indoors delightful, yet my garden claims me, monopolizing all my morning hours; and I know for me has come the season's summons which I shall not set aside: no, not for studies nor hospitalities which become rivals for my time and attentions. My garden waits; is the civiller host, the better entertainer. Then I have a religion in this business, and duties must waive compliments. My tasks are not postponable during the summer days; if called away from these engagements, I shall first take counsel of my plants for leave of absence, with intent of hastening back. Importunities were impertinent while the spell is on me. Would the sun but shine all night long for my work to continue! Sure of gathering the better crop, I bend to my task, foreseeing the avails of leisure coming in at the close of my autumn rounds.

"Me, let my poverty to ease resign
When my bright hearth reflects its blazing cheer,
In season let me plant the pliant vine,
And, with light hand, my swelling apples rear."

Such toils are wholesome. One cannot afford to dispense with their income of vigor. Then they fill the days with varied business, the mind gliding from head to hands, from hands to head, in pleasing interludes, to pour for him so deep a draught of Lethe, and so refreshing, that the morning breaks only to release the sleeper to begin anew his labors with the old enthusiasm. Even the stiffness of his fatigues promotes rectitude and probity of carriage: his hearty affection for his pursuit, shedding lustre on all he takes in hand. His garden is ever charming, always opportune. He walks there at all hours, at sunrise, noon, nightfall, finding more than he sought in it, each successive visit being as new as the first.

"All living things," says the Bhagavad Gita, "are generated from the bread they eat; bread is generated from rain, rain from divine worship, and divine worship from good works." A creed dealing thus supersensibly with the elements must have fertilizing properties, and bring the gardener to his task little tinctured by noxious notions of any kind. If he fall short of being the reverent naturalist, the devout divine, surrounded thus by shapes of skill, types of beauty, tokens of design, every hue in the chromatic, every device in the symbolic gamut, I see not what shall make him these; nor why Newton, Goethe, Boëhme, should have published their discoveries for his benefit; why it should occur to him to use his eyes at all when he looks through this glass, regards these signatures, views these blooms, these clasping tendrils, laughing leaves, Tyrian draperies, the sympathies of his plants and trees with the weather, their sleep, their thirst for the mists, and worship of the East; as if

Moistures their mothers were,
Their fathers flames,

and earth were virtually "wife of heaven," as Homer says.

His is no mere cloud tillage, nor unproductive earth culture. The firmament overhead reflects its lustre in his mind, the mists ascend there from the watered ground beneath, and he sows the mingled sense and sunshine over his fields, enriching both them and himself. He takes account of the double harvest of profits: both rewarding him for his pleasures and painstakings. His faithful counsellor and genial moralist, the ground, holds strict terms with him; nor weeds nor nettles have tales to tell, since they cannot thrive under his shadow. He minds his proper affairs; is industrious, punctual; home keeper, and time keeper no less, taking his tasks diligently as they rise. His work begins with the

spring, and continues till winter; nor has he many spare minutes; the slipping away of twelve hours being the loss of a twelvemonth, unless he do that instantly which ought to be done at the moment.

Taking timely counsel of his experience, he adapts his labors to the seasons as they pass; has his eye on sun and soil at once. Nor shall I think the less of his piety, if he be touched a little with that amiable superstition concerning the planetary influences; since it ill becomes him to hold lightly any faith that serves to brighten his affections and establish sweet relationships between himself and natural things. In sympathy with earth and heaven, these conspire for his benefit: all helping to fructify and ripen his crops. It is unlawful to regard them as enemies of human tillage. Gracefully the seasons come round for weaving into his fancy, if not his faith, the old world's ritual as a religion of engagements. He is an ephemeris and weather-glass. He has his signs too, and aspects, his seasons, periods and stints. The months sway him. What if he sympathize with the year as it rolls; take equinoxially his March and September? Will his intermediate times be the less genial in consequence, or his April fail of distilling mystic moods with her fertilizing rains? His winter may come hoar with ideas, and brown October shall be his golden age of orchards and their ambrosia. And as June best displays the garden's freshness, so October celebrates the orchard's opulence, to crown the gardener for his labors. The golden days running fast and full have not run to waste. Orchards and gardens bloom again. He harvests the richer crop these have ripened; bright effluences of the stars, for the feast of thought and the flow of discourse. Having thus "gathered the first roses of spring and the last apples of autumn," he is ready to dispute felicity with the happiest man living, and to chant his pæan of praise for his prosperity: —

The earth is mine and mine the sheaves,
I'll harvest all her bounty leaves,
Nor stinted store she deals to me,
Gives all she has, and gives it free,
Since from myself I cannot stir
But I become her pensioner:
Sun, cloud, flame, atom, ether, sea,
Beauteous she buildeth into me,
Seasons my frame with flowing sense,
Insinuates intelligence;
Feeds me and fills with sweet contents,
Deals duteously her elements:
Dawn, day, the noon, the sunset clear,
Delight my eye; winds, woods, my ear,
While apple, melon, strawberry, peach,
She plants and puts within my reach;
Regales with all the garden grows,
Whate'er the orchard buds and blows;
Lifts o'er my head her sylvan screens,
And sows my slopes with evergreens,
While odorous roses, mint, and thyme,
Steep soul and sense in softer clime;
Preserves me when lapsed memory slips
Fading in sleep's apocalypse;
Surprising tasks and leisures sends,
And crowns herself to give me friends;
The morn's elixir pours for me,
And brims my brain with ecstasy.

Earth all is mine and mine the sheaves,
I harvest all her Planter leaves.

iv. – the orchard

Orchards are even more personal in their charms than gardens, as they are more nearly human creations. Ornaments of the homestead, they subordinate other features of it; and such is their sway over the landscape that house and owner appear accidents without them. So men delight to build in an ancient orchard, when so fortunate as to possess one, that they may live in the beauty of its surroundings. Orchards are among the most coveted possessions; trees of ancient standing, and vines, being firm friends and royal neighbors forever. The profits, too, are as wonderful as their longevity. And if antiquity can add any worth to a thing, what possession has a man more noble than these? so unlike most others, which are best at first and grow worse till worth nothing; while fruit-trees and vines increase in worth and goodness for ages. An orchard in bloom is one of the most pleasing sights the eye beholds; as if the firmament had stooped to the tree-tops and touched every twig with spangles, and man had mingled his essence with the seasons, in its flushing tokens. And how rich the spectacle at the autumnal harvest:

"Behold the bending boughs, with store of fruit they tear,
And what they have brought forth, for weight, they scarce can bear."

Apples are general favorites. Every eye covets, every hand reaches to them. It is a noble fruit: the friend of immortality, its virtues blush to be tasted. Every Muse delights in it, as its mythology shows, from the gardens of the Hesperides to the orchard of Plato. A basket of pearmains, golden russets, or any of the choice kinds, standing in sight, shall perfume the scholar's composition as it refreshes his genius. He may snatch wildness from the woods, get shrewdness from cities, learning from libraries and universities, compliments from courts. But for subtlety of thought, for sovereign sense, for color, the graces of diction and behavior, he best betakes himself

"Where on all sides the apples scattered lie,
Each under its own tree."

Or to his bins, best, Columella says, when beechen chests, such as senators' and judges' robes were laid in in his day; these to be "placed in a dry place, free from frosts, where neither smoke, nor any thing noisome may come; the fruit spread on sawdust, and so arranged that the fleurets, or blossom ends, may look downwards, and the pedicles, or stalks, upwards, after the same manner as it grew upon the tree; and so as not to touch one another. And better if gathered a little green; the lids of the chests covering them close."

The ancient rustic authors give very little information concerning the apples and pears of their time, thinking them too well known to be described, as an author writing of our time might of ours. Most of them had their names from men who brought them into Italy and there cultivated them, and, "by so small a matter," says Pliny, "have rendered their names immortal."

Phillips thus describes the favorites of his time, most of which we find in our own orchards, and still in good repute: —

"Now turn thine eye to view Alcinous' groves,
The pride of the Phœacian isle, from whence,

Sailing the spaces of the boundless deep,
To Ariconian precious fruits arrived: —
The pippin burnished o'er with gold, the moyle
Of sweetest honied taste, the fair pearmain,
Tempered, like comeliest nymph, with red and white;
Nor does the Eliot least deserve thy care,
Nor John's apple, whose withered rind, intrenched
With many a furrow, aptly represents
Decrepit age; nor that from Harvey named,
Quick relishing. Why should we sing the thrift,
Codling, or Pomroy, or of pimpled coat
The russet; the red-streak, that once
Was of the sylvan kind, uncivilized,
Of no regard, till Scudamore's skilful hand
Improved her, and by courtly discipline
Taught her the savage nature to forget:
Let every tree in every garden own
The red-streak as supreme, whose pulpous fruit
With gold irradiate, and vermilion spires,
Tempting, not fatal, as the birth of that
Primeval interdicted plant, that won
Fond Eve, in hapless hour, to taste and die."

A quaint old Englishman, writing about orchards, quotes the proverb: "It will beggar a doctor to live where orchards thrive." So Cowley writes: —

"Nor does this happy place only dispense
Its various pleasures to the sense,
Here health itself doth live,
That salt of life which doth to all a relish give;
Its standing pleasure and intrinsic wealth,
The body's virtue, and the soul's good fortune, health.
The tree of life when it in Eden stood,
Did its immortal head to heaven rear;
It lasted a tall cedar till the flood,
Now a small thorny shrub it doth appear,
Nor will it thrive too everywhere;
It always here is freshest seen,
'Tis only here an evergreen:
If, through the strong and beauteous fence
Of temperance and innocence,
And wholesome labors and a quiet mind,
Diseases passage find,
They must fight for it, and dispute it hard
Before they can prevail;
Scarce any plant is growing here,
Which against death some weapon does not bear:
Let cities boast that they provide
For life the ornaments of pride;

But 'tis the country and the field
That furnish it with staff and shield."

Nor can we spare his praises of budding and grafting from our account: —

"We nowhere art do so triumphant see,
As when it grafts or buds a tree;
In other things we count it to excel
If it a docile scholar can appear
To nature, and but imitates her well:
It overrules and is her master here:
It imitates her Maker's power divine,
And changes her sometimes, and sometimes does refine;
It does like grace, the fallen tree restore
To its blest state of Paradise before;
Who would not joy to see his conquering hand
O'er all the vegetable world command,
And the wild giants of the wood, receive
What laws he's pleased to give?
He bids the ill-natured crab produce
The gentle apple's winy juice,
The golden fruit that worthy is
Of Galatea's purple kiss;
He does the savage hawthorn teach
To bear the medlar and the pear;
He bids the rustic plum to rear
A noble trunk and be a peach;
Even Daphne's coyness he does mock,
And weds the cherry to her stock,
Though she refused Apollo's suit,
Even she, that chaste and virgin tree,
Now wonders at herself to see
That she's a mother made, and blushes in her fruit."

v. – sweet herbs

"Thick growing thyme, and roses wet with dew,
Are sacred to the sisterhood divine."

As orchards to man, so are flowers and herbs to women. Indeed the garden appears celibate, as does the house, without womanly hands to plant and care for it. Here she is in place, – suggests lovely images of her personal accomplishments, as if civility were first conceived in such cares, and retired unwillingly, even to houses and chambers; something being taken from their elegancy and her nobleness by an undue absorption of her thoughts in household affairs. But there is a fitness in her association with flowers and sweet herbs, as with social hospitalities, showing her affinities with the magical and medical, as if she were the plant All-Heal, and mother of comforts and spices. Once the

herb garden was a necessary part of every homestead; every country house had one well stocked, and there was a matron inside skilled in their secret virtues, having the knowledge of how her

"Herbs gladly cure our flesh, because that they
Have their acquaintance there,"

her memory running back to the old country from whence they first came, and of which they retained the fragrance. Are not their names refreshing? with the superstitions concerning the sign under which they were to be gathered, the quaint spellings; – mint, roses, fennel, coriander, sweet-cicely, celandine, summer savory, smellage, rosemary, dill, caraway, lavender, tanzy, thyme, balm, myrrh; these and many more, and all good for many an ail; sage, too, sovereign sage, best of all – excellent for longevity – of which to-day's stock seems running low, – for

"Why should man die? so doth the sentence say,
When sage grows in his garden day by day?"

This persuasion that the things near us, and under our feet, stand in that relationship from some natural affinity they have to our welfare, appears to be most firmly rooted with respect to the medical herbs, whether growing wild in the fields and woods, or about the old homesteads, though the names of most of them are now forgotten. A slight reference to the herbals and receipt books of the last century would show the good uses to which they were applied, as that the virtues of common sense are also disowned, and oftentimes trodden under foot. Certainly, they are less esteemed than formerly, being superseded, for the most part, by drugs less efficacious because less related geographically to our flesh, and not finding acquaintance therewith. Doubtless many superstitions were cherished about them in ancient heads, yet all helpful to the cure. The sweet fennel had its place in the rural garden, and was valued, not as a spice merely, but as a sacred seed, associated with worship, sprigs of it, as of caraway and dill, being taken to the pews, for appetizing the service. So the balm and rue had their sacredness. Pliny commends these natives to every housekeeper. "A good housewife," he says, "goes to her herb garden, instead of a spice shop, for seasonings, and thus preserves the health of her family, by saving her purse." So the poet sends her there, too, for spouse-keeping.

"When Venus would her dear Ascanius keep,
A prisoner in the downy bands of sleep,
She odorous herbs and flowers beneath him spread,
As the most soft and sweetest bed,
Not her own lap would more have charmed his head."

vi. – table plants

The last two centuries have added several plants of eminent virtues to the products of the orchard and garden. The cucumber, the potato, sweet corn, the melon, are the principal acquisitions, especially the last named, for that line of Marvell's —

"Stumbling on melons as I pass,"

must be taken rhetorically, since Evelyn informs us, this fruit had but just been introduced into England from Spain, in the poet's time, and the others but a little before. He says, "I myself remember when an ordinary melon would have sold for five or six shillings. 'Tis a fruit not only superior to all of

the gourd kind, but paragon with the noblest of the garden." And of the cucumber, "This fruit, now so universally eaten, was accounted little better than poison within my memory." Columella shows some good ones growing in the Roman gardens: —

"The crooked cucumber, the pregnant gourd,
Sometimes from arbors pendant, and sometimes
Snake-like, through the cold shades of grass they creep,
And from the summer's sun a shelter seek."

Whittier has sung our sweet corn, as Marvell the melon for Old England. But Raleigh declined that service for his new Roanoke plant, the potato, leaving it for the books to give this prose version instead: – "Sir Walter gave some samples of it to his gardener as a fine fruit from Virginia, desiring him to plant them. The roots flowered in August, and in September produced the fruit; but the berries were so different from what the gardener expected, that, in ill-humor, he carried them to his master, asking, if this was the fine fruit which he had praised so highly? Sir Walter either was, or pretended to be ignorant of the matter, and desired the gardener, since that was the case, to dig up the weed and throw it away." It appears, however, that the gardener, who was an Irishman, and had the best of rights to christen it, soon returned with the good parcel of potatoes, from whose thrift his own country was supplied, and in time distributed so widely as almost to supersede the ancient turnips, once the favorite of husbandmen; the more religious of them, Columella tells us, in his time, "sprinkling the seed when they sowed it as if they meant to supply the King, and his subjects also."

The turnip and the bean – this last held sacred by the Greeks, and which Pythagoras honored with a symbol – have lost much of the solid repute they once enjoyed here in New England and elsewhere. Good citizens and loyal republicans were fed chiefly from their stanch virtues, knowing how to prize their independence, and to secure it to their descendants. The great staples were grown on their farms and manufactured into substantial comforts without loss of self-respect. Bread was home-grown, kneaded of fresh flour, ground in the neighborhood; the grain sown in hope, their

"Six months' sunshine bound in sheaves,"

being brought home in thankfulness. The grain harvesting was the pride and praise of the country round, as good to be sung as the Syrian pastoral of Ruth gleaning in the fields of Boaz. But this, and other customs, introduced with the cultivation of wheat into Britain, and brought here by the Puritan planters, are fast fading from memory, and the coming generation will need commentaries on Tusser and Thomson to make plain our reaping-idyl.

As kindles now the blazing East
Afield I haste,
Eager the sickle's feat to play,
Sweeping along the stalked fields my widening way;
Vexing the eared spires,
Pricked with desires,
My golden gavels on the stubble spend,
And to the fair achievement every member lend,
The laughing breeze my colleague in my forte,
While the grave sun beams zealous on the sport.
Nor doth penurious gain famish my fist,
As earing fast it sheds abundant grist,
And gleaning damsels kerchief all they list, —

Kindly conceive me friendliest of peers,
And glad my brows adorn with yellow ears;
The wide-spread field, its sheafed hoard,
The lively symbol of their liberal Lord,
Whose plenteous crop, and ripe supply
Areapéd is of every hand and eye —
An opulent shock for poor humanity.

Their garments, too, were home-spun. Every house, the scene of sprightly industry, was Homeric as were the employments in the garden of Alcinous,

"Where to encounter feast with housewifery,
In one room, numerous women did apply
Their several tasks; some apple-colored corn
Ground in fair querns, and some did spindles turn;
Some work in looms; no hand least rest receives,
But all have motion apt as aspen leaves;
And from the weeds they wove, so fast they laid
And so thick thrust together thread by thread,
That the oil of which the wool had drank its fill,
Did with his moisture in bright dews distil."

It was plain wool and flax which they spun and wove thus innocently, nor suspected the web of sophistries that was to be twisted and coiled about the countries' liberties from a coming rival. "The weed which, planted long ago by the kings of Tyre, made their city a great nation, their merchantmen princes, and spread the Tyrian dye throughout the world; of which Solomon obtained a branch, and made his little kingdom the admiration of surrounding nations; of which Alexander sowed the seed in the city to which he gave his name, and Constantine transplanted to Constantinople; which the first Edward sowed on the banks of the Thames, and Elizabeth lived to see blossom through the nourishment which her enlightened mind procured, not only from the original soil of the Levant but from the eastern and newly discovered western world, as well as from the North," – this famous plant, thus cherished by kings, has now become King, and wields its sceptre over the most cultivated and prosperous nations of the earth; its history for the last half century being more closely woven with civilization, than perhaps any other commodity known to commerce. And whether it shall be woven into robes of coronation or the shroud of freedom, for the freest of Republics, the fortunes of races, the present moment is determining.

Lettuce has always been loyal. Herodotus tells us that it was served at royal tables some centuries before the Christian era, and one of the Roman families ennobled its name with that of Lactucinü. So spinach, asparagus and celery have been held in high repute among the eastern nations, as with us. And the parable of the mustard seed shows that plant was known in Christ's time. The Greeks are said to have esteemed radishes so highly that, in offering oblations to Apollo, they presented them in beaten gold. And the Emperor Tiberius held parsnips in such high repute that he had them brought annually from the Rhine for his table. The beet is still prized, but the carrot has lost the reputation it had in Queen Elizabeth's time, the leaves being used in the head-dresses of the ladies of her court, from whence the epithet applied to the hair is derived.

Peas had scarcely made their appearance at the tables of the court of Elizabeth, "being very rare," Fuller says, "in the early part of her reign, and seldom seen except they were brought from Holland, and these were dainties for ladies, they came so far and cost so dear." Nor did the currant appear much earlier in European gardens, coming first under the name of the Corinthian grape:

Evelyn calls the berries Corinths. So the damson took its name from Damascus; the cherry from Cerasus, a city of Pontus; and the peach from Persia. The quince, first known as the Cydonian apple, was dedicated to the goddess of love; and pears, like apples, are from Paradise.

The apple is the representative fruit, and owes most to culture in its ancient varieties of quince, pear, pomegranate, citron, peach; as it comprehended all originally. Of these, pears and peaches have partaken more largely of man's essence, and may be called creations of his, being civilized in the measure he is himself; as are the apple and the grape. These last are more generally diffused over the earth, and their history embraces that of the origin and progress of mankind, the apple being coeval with man; Eve's apple preserving the traditions of his earliest experiences, and the grape appears in connection with him not long after his story comes into clearness from the dimness of the past.

Fruits have the honor of being most widely diffused geographically, grown with the kindliest care, and of being first used by man as food. They still enter largely into the regimen of the cultivated nations, and are the fairest of civilizers; like Orpheus, they tame the human passions to consonance and harmony by their lyric influence. The use of them is of that universal importance that we cannot subsist in any plenty or elegance without them. And everywhere beside the cultivated man grows the orchard, to intimate his refinement in those excellences most befitting his race. The Romans designated the union of all the virtues in the word we render fruit; and bread comes from Pan, the representative of Nature, whose stores we gather for our common sustenance in our pantries. Biography shows that fruit has been the preferred food of the most illuminated persons of past times, and of many of the ablest. It is friendly to the human constitution, and has been made classic by the pens of poets who have celebrated its beauty and excellence.

vii. – rations

The food of a people may be taken as a natural gauge of their civility. In any scale of the relative virtues of plants, fruits take their place at the top, the grains next, then the herbs, last and lowest the roots. The rule seems this:

Whatever grows above ground, and tempered in the solar ray, is most friendly to the strength, genius and beauty proper to man.

The poet has intimated the law:

> "Plants in the root with earth do most comply,
> Their leaves with water and humidity;
> The flowers to air draw near and subtilty,
> And seeds a kindred fire have with the sky."

So the ancient doctrine affirms that the originals of all bodies are to be found in their food, every living creature representing its root and feeding upon its mother; and that from the food chosen, is derived the spirit and complexion of each; persons, plants, animals, being tempered of earth or sun, according to their likings.

> Apollo feeds his fair ones, Ceres hers,
> Pomona, Pan, dun Jove, and Luna pale;
> So Nox her olives, so swarth Niobe.

It was the doctrine of the Samian Sage, that whatsoever food obstructs divination, is prejudicial to purity and chastity of mind and body, to temperance, health, sweetness of disposition, suavity of manners, grace of form, and dignity of carriage, should be shunned. Especially should those who would apprehend the deepest wisdom and preserve through life the relish for elegant studies

and pursuits, abstain from flesh, cherishing the justice which animals claim at man's hands, nor slaughtering them for food nor profit. And, anciently, there existed what is called the Orphic Life, men keeping fast to all things without life, and abstaining wholly from those that had.

And, aside from all considerations of humanity for the animals, genius and grace alike enjoin abstinence from every indulgence that impairs the beauty and order of things. Our instincts instruct us to protect, to tame and transform, as far as may be, the animals we domesticate into the image of gentleness and humanity, and that these traits in ourselves are impaired by converting their flesh into ours. Nor do any pleas of necessity avail. Since the experience of large classes of mankind in different climates shows conclusively that health, strength, beauty, agility, sprightliness, longevity, the graces and attainments appertaining to body and mind, are insured, if not best promoted, by abstinence from animal food. Science, moreover, favors this experience, since it teaches that man extracts his bodily nourishment mediately or immediately from the vegetable kingdom, and thus lives at the cost of the atmosphere, needing not the interfusion of the spirit of beasts into his system to animalize and sustain him. "He feeds on air alone, springs from it, and returns to it again."

A purer civilization than ours can yet claim to be, is to inspire the genius of mankind with the skill to deal dutifully with soils and souls, exalt agriculture and manculture into a religion of art; the freer interchange of commodities which the current world-wide intercourse promotes, spread a more various, wholesome, classic table, whereby the race shall be refined of traits reminding too plainly of barbarism and the beast. "Ye desire from the gods excellent health and a beautiful old age, but your table opposes itself, since it fetters the hands of Zeus."[1]

"Time may come when man
With angels may participate and find
No inconvenient diet, no too light fare,
And, from these corporal nutriments, perhaps,
Their bodies may at last turn all to Spirit
Improved by tract of time, and winged ascend
Ethereal as they; or may at choice
Here, or in heavenly Paradises, dwell."

An elegant abstinence is complimentary to any one, as, fed from the virgin essences of the season, his genius, dispositions, tastes, have no shame to blush for, and modestly claim the honor of being well bred. And one's table, like Apelles', may be fitly pictured with the beauty of sobriety on the one side, the deformity of excess on the other, the feast substantial as it is lyrical, praising itself and those who partake; and his guests as ready to compliment him, as Timotheus did Plato, when he said: "They who dine with the philosopher never complain the next morning."

THE SEER'S RATIONS

Takes sunbeams, spring waters,
Earth's juices, meads' creams,
Bathes in floods of sweet ethers,
Comes baptized from the streams;

[1] Grillis having been transformed from a beast into a man, used to discourse with his table companions, about how much better he fed while in that state than his present one, since he then took instinctively what was best for him, avoiding what was hurtful; but now, he said, though endowed with reason and natural knowledge to guide him in the selection, he yet seemed to have fallen below the beast he was, since he found he liked what did not like him, and took it, moreover, without shame.

Guest of Him, the sweet-lipp'd,
The Dreamer's quaint dreams.

Mingles morals idyllic
With Samian fable,
Sage seasoned from cruets,
Of Plutarch's chaste table.

Pledges Zeus, Zoroaster,
Tastes Cana's glad cheer,
Suns, globes, on his trencher,
The elements there.

Bowls of sunrise for breakfast
Brimful of the East,
Foaming flagons of frolic
His evening's gay feast.

Sov'reign solids of nature,
Solar seeds of the sphere,
Olympian viand
Surprising as rare.

Thus baiting his genius,
His wonderful word
Brings poets and sibyls
To sup at his board.

Feeds thus and thus fares he,
Speeds thus and thus cares he,
Thus faces and graces
Life's long euthanasies,

His gifts unabated,
Transfigured, translated —
The idealist prudent,
Saint, poet, priest, student,
Philosopher, he.

viii. – economies

" – Much will always wanting be
To him who much desires. Thrice happy he
To whom the indulgency of heaven,
With sparing hand, but just enough has given."

Life, when hospitably taken, is a simple affair. Very little suffices to enrich us. Being, a fountain and fireside, a web of cloth, a garden, a few friends, and good books, a chosen task, health and peace of mind – these are a competent estate, embracing all we need.

"Like to one's fortune should be his expense,
Men's fortunes rightly held in reverence."

The country opens the best advantages for these enjoyments. And where one has the privilege of choosing for himself, he prefers the scope for seclusion and society that a homestead implies. For his human satisfactions, he draws upon his dispositions and gifts. His appetites he willingly digs for, nor cares to cherish any that he is ashamed to own. For nobler pleasures he delights to climb. His best estate is in himself. He needs little beside. With good sense for his main portion to make the most of that little, he may well consider Hesiod's opinion of weight:

"The half is better far than whole."

If his house is an ancient one, or ancestral, by so much the stronger are the ties that bind his affections to it; especially if it stand in an orchard, and have a good garden. Even if inconvenient in some respects, he will hesitate about pulling it down in hopes of pleasing himself better in a new one. The genius that repairs an old house successfully may fail in building another. Besides, there were many comforts provided for by our ancestors, who were old Englishmen even here in New England, and knew well what a house was built for, and they built for that, against any odds of counsel or expense. Then 'tis fatal to take time out of a building, which so consecrates it.

An old house, well built, pleases more with the repairs rendered necessary than a costlier new one. There are good points about it which have been proved by a century or two, and these may be adopted as parts for preserving, while any additions may be made for holding the whole in keeping with the orignal design, or as improvements on it. Perhaps there are snug recesses, and window-seats, spacious entries, hospitable stairways, wainscoting, finished summers running across the ceilings, a dry cellar, a good well, fence rows in natural places, shrubbery, which if not well set can be reset in the grounds; an orchard and garden whose mould is infused with the genius of years and humanized for culture. Then the tenement has its genealogy, and belongs to the race who have built into it a history. Trees, too, venerable with age it has, or it could not have been the residence of gentlemen. Outbuildings of any kind, useful or ornamental, have found their proper sites, and meet the eye as if they had always been there. It takes some generations to complete and harmonize any place with the laws of beauty, as these best honor themselves in that fairest of structures, a human mansion; which, next to its occupant, is the noblest symbol of the mind that art can render to the senses. One may spend largely upon it, if he have not ousted his manliness in amassing the money. That is an honest house which has the owner's honor built into its apartments, and whose appointments are his proper ornaments.

Building is a severe schoolmaster, and gets the best and worst out of us, both, before it has done with us. I conclude no man knows himself on terms cheaper than the building of one house at least, and paying for it out of his pains. The proverb says:

"'Tis a sweet impoverishment, and a great waste of gall."

Do we not build ourselves into its foundations, to stand or fall with its beams and rafters, every nail being driven in trouble from sills to roof-tree, and the whole proving often a defeat and disappointment: no one liking it, the builder least of all? One may thank heaven, and not himself, if he do not find

He builded costlier than he knew,
Unhoused himself and virtues too,

at the dismission of his carpenters, and occupancy of it. Perhaps the idea of a house is too precious to be cut into shapes of comfort and comeliness on cheaper conditions than this trial of his manliness by the payment of his equanimity as the fair equivalent for the privilege. Nor is this the end of the matter, since it costs many virtues to deal dutifully by his household, by servants – if served by second hands – day by day, and come forth from the stewardship with credit and self-respect.

But a garden is a feasible matter. 'Tis within the means of almost every one; none, or next to none, are so destitute, or indifferent, as to be without one. It may be the smallest conceivable, a flower bed only, yet is prized none the less for that. It is loved all the more for its smallness, and the better cared for. Virgil advises to

– "Commend large fields,
But cultivate small ones."

And it was a saying of the Carthaginians, that "the land should be weaker than the husbandman, since of necessity he must wrestle with it, and if the ground prevailed, the owner must be crushed by it." The little is much to the frugal and industrious; and the least most to him who puts that little to loving usury.

"We are the farmers of ourselves, yet may
If we can stock ourselves and thrive, repay
Much, much good treasure for the great rent day."

'Tis a pity that men want eyes, oftentimes, to harvest crops from their acres never served to them from their trenchers. Civilization has not meliorated mankind essentially while men hold themselves to services they make menial and degrading. Æleas, king of Scythia, was wont to say ingeniously, that "while he was doing nothing, he differed in nothing from his groom," thus discriminating between services proper to freemen and slaves. The humblest labors may ennoble us. Honorable in themselves when properly undertaken, they promote us from things to persons. They give us the essential goods of existence as we deserve and can best enjoy them: order, namely, industry, leisure, of which idleness defrauds, and distraction deprives us. Labor suffices. Putting us, for the time, beyond anxiety and our caprices, it calls into exercise the sentiments proper to the citizen. It softens and humanizes other pleasures. Like philosophy, like religion, it revenges on fortune, and so keeps us by the One amidst the multitude of our perplexities – against reverses, and above want. By making us a party in the administration of affairs, and superior to Fate, it puts into our hands the iron keys for unlocking her wards, and thus gives us to opulence and independence. We become, thereby, the subjects and friends of Saturn, ever known to be a person of so strict justice as he forces none to serve him unwillingly, and has nothing private to himself, but all things in common, as of one universal patrimony. And so, owning nothing, because wanting nothing, he had all things desirable to make life rich and illustrious.

– "This Golden Age
Met all contentment in no surplusage
Of dainty viands, but, (as we do still,)
Drank the pure water of the crystal rill,
Fed on no other meats than those they fed —
Labor the salad that their stomachs bred."

Labor saves us from the chaos of sloth, the pains of shiftlessness. It sweetens the fountains of our enjoyments; 'tis neighbor to the elements. Coming in from July heats, we taste the sweetness of Pindar's line,

"Water with purest lustre flows,"

of whose zest the idler knows nothing, and which the sensualist soils and spoils. Besides, there are advantages to be gained from intimacy with farmers, whose wits are so level with the world they measure and work in. We become one of them for the time, by sympathy of employment, and get the practical skill and adaptedness that comes from yoking our idealism in their harness of uses. Thus, too, we come to comprehend the better the working classes which minister so largely to the comforts of all men, and are so deserving of consideration for their services. Moreover, this laboring with plain men is the best cure for any foolishness one may have never sounded in the depths of his egotism, or scorn of persons in humbler stations than his own; and the swiftest leap across the gulf yawning between his pride and the humility gracing a gentleman in any walk of life.

ix. – rural culture

"Nor need the muse to palaces resort,
Or bring examples only from the court,
The country strives to do our subject right,
And gard'ning is the gentleman's delight."

I consider it the best part of an education to have been born and brought up in the country; the arts of handicraft and husbandry coming by mother wit, like the best use of books, the language one speaks. There is virtue in country houses, in gardens and orchards, in fields, streams and groves, in rustic recreations and plain manners, that neither cities nor universities enjoy. Nor is it creditable to the teaching that so few college graduates take to husbandry and rural pursuits. Held subordinate to thought, as every calling should be, these promote intellectual freshness and moral vigor. They have been made classic by the genius of antiquity; are recreations most becoming to men of every profession and rank in life: —

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.