

THE DOORSTEP.

The conference meeting through at last,
We boys around the vestry waited
To see the girls come tripping past
Like snow-birds willing to be mated.

Not braver he who leaps the wall
By level musket-dashes lites,
Than I, who stepped before them all,
Who longed to see me get the mitten.

But no; she blushed and took my arm!
We let the old folks have the highway,
And started toward the Maple farm,
Along a kind of lover's by-way.

I can't remember what we said—
"Was nothing worth a song or story;
Yet that rude path by which we sped
Seemed all transformed and in a glory.

The snow was crisp beneath our feet,
The moon was full, the fields were gleaming.
By hood and tippet sheltered sweet
Her face with youth and health was beaming.

The little hand outside her muff—
O sculptor, if you could but mold it—
She lightly touched my jacket cuff,
To keep it warm I had to hold it.

To have her with me there alone—
'Twas love and fear and triumph blended.
At last we reached the foot-worn stone
Where that delicious journey ended.

The old folks, too, were almost home;
Her dimpled hand the latches fingered,
We heard the voices nearer come,
Yet on the doorstep still we lingered.

She shook her ringlets from her hood
And with a "Thank you, Ned," dissembled,
But yet I knew she understood
With what a daring wish I trembled.

A cloud passed kindly overhead,
The moon was slyly peeping through it,
Yet hid its face, as if it said,
"Come, now or never! do it! do it!"

My lips till then had only known
The kiss of mother and of sister,
But somehow, full upon her own
Sweet, rosy, darling mouth—I kissed her!

Perhaps 'twas boyish love, yet still,
O listless woman, weary lover!
To feel once more that fresh, wild thrill
I'd give—but who can live youth over?
—E. C. Steadman.

SPRINKLING THE "DUSTY HIGHWAY."

The following, from the *Pacific Rural Press*, by Mrs. Mollie Stafford, is a reply to an article which appeared in that journal entitled, "The Dusty Highway of Life:"

The earnest but amiably written article, "The Dusty Highway of Life," by Sister Agnes, of Santa Clara, has brought out a train of reflections, and calls to mind some similar experiences in my own life.

It has been many years ago since I had my first experience in housekeeping, and I can look back now over the long lapse of time and see many difficulties that were then to me mountains, but now appear as mere mole hills. Her perplexity in regard to coming from the kitchen to receive and entertain company, is a perplexity common, I think, to most young housekeepers. I well remember it was one of the most embarrassing dilemmas in which I could be placed. How often has my pride, uncommonly sensitive, been wounded on receiving company at some unusual hour, as I was conscious of the fact that my dress was not immaculate, nor my hair done up in the latest style, for, of course, I had read that abominable and unpracticable theory that all good housekeepers must always be as "neat and clean as a pin." Time, observation and experience have disproved this theory; and there is no more reason why a housekeeper should be always dressed and ready to receive company, and always have time to entertain company, than should a carpenter, blacksmith or farmer. It may not be, as Sister Agnes asks, "really an accomplishment" for a

lady to be called away from her kitchen work, however imperative her immediate presence there may be, and go to the parlor and receive and entertain company. If not an accomplishment it certainly requires perfect self-possession, frankness and politeness. If the hostess is a true lady we will not fail to perceive the grace and refinement through all these disadvantages. She will welcome her guests cordially and politely, knowing full well that a sensible person will overlook her working garb; and if her presence is necessary in the kitchen, she will, as the *RURAL* remarks, make a frank statement of the case and go and attend to her duties. The pudding must not be burned, nor the hired men be made to wait for their dinners, by any means.

It may be added here that a good, systematic housekeeper, unless overburdened with work, will always make it a rule to get through with her rough work in the morning and before the dinner hour demands her attention. She then has the long, bright afternoon before her for her own, in which she can don a fresh dress, neat collar, arrange her hair and appear as fresh as a daisy. She has this time, then, to devote to sewing, reading, writing, receiving and returning calls. By the assistance of the sewing machine, one need not be everlastingly making dresses and aprons; and in most cases there is a wide margin of time left for the culture of brain and soul, even for the farmer's wife and daughter, although Sister Agnes says "we hear complaints of a want of grace and refinement on the part of the farmer, his wife, his son or his daughter." Now, we should like to know who complained? It must be that class of persons who, to use a homely but expressive phrase, "strain at a gate and swallow a barn."

Time was, when the farmer in his vocation, did not aspire to grace and refinement. When on the frontiers of our far Western States, his only ambition and endeavor was to till a few acres of land and keep a vigilant outlook on the border in order to fight back the invading foe; his habitation being part fort and part hut. They were a rough, hardy set, endowed with great strength of muscle, endurance and bravery. That class of farmers has passed away with advancing civilization, and the growth and development of education. With them has passed away their mode of farming, their style of living, and the old-received idea of a want of grace and refinement in the farming community. It is simply "a case of then and now;" for with our enlightened civilization, our broad opportunities and many advantages, is there any reason why the farmer of to-day should lack grace and refinement? It is not a case of hereditary ignorance and boorishness handed down from sire to son, for many of our farmers, especially California farmers, were formerly denizens of cities, brought up amid arts, culture and refinement, and many of them are born to the heritage of refinement, on whose broad shoulders it rests as gracefully while handling the plow as if he were wielding a power in the halls of Congress. The refinement of a true gentleman or lady will be recognized in whatsoever position we find them, even through the dirt and dust, and under the homely garb of the farm life.

Again, Sister Agnes says: "Our sons and daughters are made to shrink from polished society, because of their conscious want of practice in the fine arts." Practice in the fine arts. Hum! What are the fine arts, and where is the polished society, if our sons and daughters do not contribute largely to it? To what intent and purpose have we contributed to the building of costly schools of learning—colleges, universities, etc.? And on whom do these institutions of learning depend in great measure for support and attendance, if not on the farmers sons and daughters? In most farm houses there are musical instruments; books from the best authors; pencil sketches from some embryo artist of the family and choice pictures, while we have access by mail, many of us, to the daily papers and other journals. If, with all these things, there is still a lamentable want of grace and refinement among us, and our "sons

and daughters are made to shrink from polished society" in consequence, whose fault is it?

I omitted to mention the fact that every district is supplied with a school-house, where are taught the rudiments, if you will, just the stepping stones to better things, but not to despise so small a fact. We have seen some highly polished ladies and gentlemen emerge into society with no better advantages than those schools afford. True, there are many isolated farm houses, owners and tenants on large tracts of land, who are shut out by the baneful system of land monopoly from we may say all advantages of society: no day school, no Sunday school, no religious services, for be it remembered, civilization and refinement are the handmaidens of Christianity, and Christianity is the light of the home, be it in city life or farm life. While we deplore the fact that we have not all the advantages we could wish, culture and refinement and education in the farm life, yet we are conscious that we have enough to mold our boys into men of intelligence, industry, sound morals, and, in short, Christian gentlemen; and to make of our girls, refined, cultivated, womanly women, noted for a high tone of purity of action and thought.

Our present mode of farming and farm life, though not as yet just perfect, is a long stride in advance of the farm life of our forefathers; but with all its imperfections, hard work and disappointment, and there are very many, I am free to confess, that after an experience of several years, I feel wedded to life on the farm. There is a certain fascination connected with it; a fascination born of a feeling of independence and liberty. It is ours to look over the broad acres, now green with the emerald of the early year, now golden with the glory of midsummer.

It is ours to roam the distant mountain in quest of its myriad wild flowers and catch a glimpse of the landscape leagues below us and beyond; to wander into the orchard and pluck the choicest fruits, to gather the freshest vegetables; to eat of the fattings of the flock; in short, to live under our "own vine and fig tree." And standing up under the broad canopy of never-fading blue, looking over the endless fields of verdure, hearing the wild, free carol of Nature's warblers, and sensitive to the soft whisperings of the south wind that wooes us with its winsome fragrance, there comes to us a feeling like an inspiration; a love of liberty and independence; a love of solitude made familiar by the voices of Nature; a love for the horny-handed farmer and his busy wife; and whether there is a want of refinement and culture among us as a class, we leave the question open to debate, and I hope some more graceful pen than mine may take the subject in hand.

If we are really and truly wanting in grace, refinement and culture, then we must admit that labor is degrading; but has not the modern farmer done much to elevate and ennoble labor? In so doing he elevates and ennobles his vocation.

MORNING WALKS NOT HEALTHFUL.—It is a great mistake, says a medical writer, to suppose that a morning walk or other form of exercise before breakfast is healthful; the malaria which rests on the earth about sunrise in summer, when taken into the lungs and stomach, which are equally debilitated with other portions of the body from the long fast since supper, is very readily absorbed and enters the circulation within an hour or two, poisoning the blood, and laying the foundation for troublesome diseases; while in winter the same debilitated condition of these vital organs readily allows the blood to be chilled, and thus renders the system susceptible of taking cold, with all its varied and too often disastrous results. Some will say, look how healthy the farmer's boy is, and the daily laborers, who go to their work from one year's end to another by "crack of dawn!" My reply is, if they are healthy, they are so in spite of these exposures; their simple fare, their regular lives and their out-door industry, give their bodies a tone, a vigor, a capability of resisting disease, which nullifies the action of malaria to a very considerable extent.