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Letters

“Three Acres and Liberty” Bolton Hall's “Three Acres and Liberty” is one of that growing class of books designed to convince people of small means, or no means but abundant energy, that many of them would not only lead healthier and more rational lives on small farms, but handle more money as well, than they do in city tenements, holding on to precarious positions on suffrage of their employers. It is shown by statistics gathered from various parts of the United States and Europe that by intensive farming and a judicious rotation of crops a family can live on the fat of the land and sell the surplus products to the betterment of a banking account, but at the same time, that this means work, hard and plenty of it; that the Small farmer cannot adhere to an eight-hour day, and that weeds grow while the farmer sleeps.

Mr. Hall has not concealed the fallacy of “average” crops, nor in any other way “jollied” his readers over difficulties. On the contrary, he carefully calls attention to the facts, that because ten square feet of a garden have been made to produce a certain phenomenal crop, it does not follow that multiplying ten by twenty or fifty will give the yield of ten or fifty times that area, but rather that as in the case of a pauper and a billionaire, the “average” wealth may be half a billion, but the pauper is none the better off in pocket for that. Our author points out one plain truth when he speaks of large farms, which are not productive in proportion to their size, since it is not great acreage, but intensive work which counts in the yield. It was once the boast of California that on the big valley grain farms the plowmen ran a furrow from sun rise to sunset without turning, but most of the large ranches have long since been subdivided to the betterment of the country. The average farmer has too much land, which he cultivates in a desultory manner, spending many hours in walking

back and forth to his work, and much of his money in the building and repair of fences. There was a period in California when every husbandman secured a one hundred and sixty acre homestead, scattered his fields with wheat or oats, and called his work done until harvest, meanwhile sitting on the fence or the porch to smoke, curse the weather and wait for the railroad to come along and make his place valuable enough to sell.

It is not practicable for every city dweller to turn farmer. Many are foredoomed to failure, and, moreover, since a market is the important factor in making a success of small truck farming, it would be impossible to secure holdings, however small, near enough to cities to make the venture worth while, but what can be taken advantage of is the ordinary city back yard. The results chronicled of patches ten feet by twenty, or of smaller proportions are an inspiration. It is only a few years ago that nearly all the potatoes consumed in San Francisco were raised on the Mission hills, when wild blackberries were regarded as a pest, and strawberries and gooseberries common.

Most of the old settlers had small orchards, and occasional fruit trees, relics of the older time, are still to be found here and there. The manner in which the roses, callas, palms and laurestinias persisted in sending up new shoots through the huddle of bricks after the fire a year ago is sufficient indication of the fertility of the Soil, and the real estate dealers claim that never before in our history was there so much inclination amongst the people to own their own homes. The kitchen garden might well receive the attention of the people at large. The children who now spend their time roaming the streets and skating on the sidewalks could easily raise all the ordinary vegetables the family could eat, and at the same time have healthful exercise and an interest in the home, while learning more of "nature study" in every five minutes spent in the garden than they will in five years of schoolroom talky-talk.

The street refuse which collects in front of the home lot and makes only for unsightliness would furnish all the needed fertilizer for a small garden patch, and thus would be solved the problems of clean streets and what to do with the boys. The initial cost of a back yard garden is small. A spade, a hoe and a rake are all the implements needed. A few feet of garden hose will last for years, as will the other tools, with reasonable care, and fifty cents worth of assorted seed will be more than ample.

Indeed, for a first experiment, half the quantity will still leave some for exchange. A few raspberry or blackberry canes planted around the fences will hide the bare walls and furnish fruit in abundance, and fresh lettuce, radishes, cabbage, tomatoes, onions, parsley, chives, or whatever else the individual palate may crave, are not to be despised. Many of { the women who are now hand-painting bolting-cloth doilies and wearing the souls out of editors with their futile efforts at literature would be occupying themselves to better advantage if they raised vegetables for the family table and saved the money thus spent. "Three Acres and Liberty" is abundantly supplied with tables of statistics, a "planting table," a list of books pertaining to general and special farming, and other practical matters. It is not to be confounded with : "while you wait" schemes of getting rich over night, but, on the contrary, holds out no inducement to any who are unwilling to work, and work, and then work some more. But work is not drudgery when approached in the right spirit, and the masterless one, not bound by conventional hours, nor limited by stated rewards in the shape of wages may find both profit and satisfaction in farming on a small scale. Published by the Macmillan Company.