

COMPLEXITIES OF SIMPLE LIFE; EX-NEW YORKERS AS FARMERS

By a Former New Yorker.

WHEN the wife and I decided that we could not keep up with the New York game of swank, and that it was not worth while anyway, we began looking for an escape to the simple life. Columns of newspaper guff have been written about the "pure," the "subtle charm," the "pitiless enchantment" of "Little Old New York." It's as easy to get away from New York as it is to get there, and a great deal easier than getting away from a New Hampshire farm, like that which we bought, or rather had thrown in when we bought a wide-spreading view of the mountains, lakes and forests of the Granite State.

I am not going to bore you with the sordid details of how we became landed proprietors of 100 acres and a farmhouse—more than 100 years old. We didn't need 100 acres, but we could get them for only a little more than half that area would cost. It was not a heavily-stocked farm—only a couple of cows, a work horse, a few hens and a driving horse which we subsequently learned had been one of a pair that at infrequent intervals hauled the local hearse, and in that avocation had acquired habits which stuck to him through life. We had the gardens plowed by a neighbor, who also gave us much advice as to the proper kind of fertilizer to use for each of the different crops. (He was the local fertilizer agent.) But the stock, with a couple of cats, did not appear to be burdensome, and life bid fair to become one grand sweet song of Arcadian simplicity.

In the matter of modern convenience the house was, I regret to confess, somewhat lacking. Of course the first thing we had to install was a bathroom, with sanitary plumbing. Passing swiftly over the matter of expense of having this done by a plumber imported from the nearest city—a subject on which I do not care to dwell—I merely remark that the installation of the plumbing in an old house is not a matter of simple life. The water supply of the house and barn was entirely from wells, raised to a sink in the house and a trough in the barn by means of hand pumps which always seemed to have something, the matter with the valves, or "boxes," as the local vernacular had it. To have sanitary plumbing it was necessary first to secure a dependable water supply. On the hill where our farm was located there was always wind, so we decided upon a windmill for pumping water, as simpler than monkeying with a gasoline engine, to say nothing of the difference in cost of power. Then we had to dig a well over which the windmill was erected. So you see we literally began at the bottom.

"A Mere Detail."

With the well dug and the windmill ready to pump, a tank had to be constructed at the top of the house. The only place where it could be put was in the attic, built close to the chimney to keep it from freezing up in winter. As a matter of fact, it usually did freeze over an inch or two in thickness in the coldest weather, and the ice had to be chopped out and thrown out of the attic window, but that is a mere detail. The first installation of the plumbing was a flat failure. The flushing of the bowl not only released a Niagara, but the water came with a series of gurglings that lasted for fully five minutes. However, a series of experiments with various well-advertised forms of plumbing fixtures brought us out of that difficulty and we settled down to the simple life.

Then came the matter of heating. The old-fashioned stoves warmed up the place fairly well, but friend wife insisted (and I made no very strenuous objection to it) upon having an open fireplace in the living room—the former parlor, which had been used only for weddings and funerals—that being the pleasantest room in the house. We found that the construction of the chimneys was such that the building of a brick fireplace would necessitate tearing down most of the house. So we compromised on a Franklin stove. This we expected to buy at a country auction, and we went to every auction for miles around in the hope of getting what we wanted. Summer passed, and we had not secured the coveted article. Finally, along in the Fall, one was advertised. It was exactly like one we had seen at an antique dealer's place in the city, for which he wanted \$60, which seemed to us an excessive price for such a piece of old iron junk. We bought the stove advertised at auction for exactly \$38, paid \$4 to have it taken home, and found out that it was the same one we had seen in the city, which had been put into the sale by the city dealer.

However, when it was finally fitted into our scheme of things in the living room, it was a cheerful sight to look upon, with the logs blazing merrily throwing out sparks on the rugs and the hardwood floor indiscriminately until we got a fire screen. I might mention the getting that hardwood floor was no simple matter, either. The carpenter left it for a week when it was half done as he wanted to visit his aunt in Vermont. But about the fire: It burned as I have said, right merrily, but for all the heat it gave out, it might as well have been a tallow candle at a distance of a hundred paces. There was no way out of it but to worry through the winter with the stoves and have a furnace put in in the Spring.

No Telephone Privacy.

There had been no telephone in the house, and as we were two miles from the village, one was deemed an imperative necessity. It took weeks and weeks to get it, because the local telephone company only had one lineman, and he was usually out somewhere repairing the line. After we got the line, we found that the placing of the receiver was no simple job. The hall was too cold; the library was so far from the kitchen and living room that the receiver couldn't be heard; the living room afforded no privacy whatever in conversation. Finally it landed in the dining room, and usually if anybody had occasion to call us, they did it at meal time, and everybody at the table allowed his dinner to get cold while he listened to a one-sided conversation over the phone.

The rural free delivery was one of the conveniences, or rather luxuries, of our simple life. The mail carrier made his rounds, if the roads were passable about 10 o'clock in the morning. Consequently, after breakfast there was an opportunity to get well started on the day's work before the carrier came along. Then, of course, everything had to stop until the mail had been examined. The headlines of the daily paper were scanned, and as the carrier

would be making his return trip to the post office in half an hour, there was a scramble to answer letters requiring immediate attention and get them in the mail box before his return. After this interruption the day's work was resumed.

There was more or less driving about the country. During that first Summer in which we lived the simple life, we went to country auctions in pursuit of genuine antiques. In spite of our experience with the Franklin stove, confirming an impression we had gained from the newspapers that country auctions were usually "salted" with fake antiques from the city dealers, we found that it was possible to get real bargains in real antique furniture by watching our opportunities. Actually, not one in a hundred country auctions has modern reproductions which are offered as genuine antiques, and nobody needs to be taken in. When there is a country auction everybody in the neighborhood drops work and goes, ostensibly as spectators, but mighty few get away without buying something. These neighbors usually know the pedigree of every article that was in the house from which the furnishings are sold, and when a strange bedstead or mirror makes its appearance it is instantly spotted and becomes the subject of audible and frank comment. "That bedstead was her mother's," somebody says, "and she brought it over here to put it in the auction." "Them hand-wove coverlets was never in this house," says another; "I bet that dealer that bought the andirons put 'em in." And only the reckless and ignorant bid on the articles to which any suspicion of foreign birth is attached. One with his ears open to the current of talk need not be fooled by buying fakes.

Our first Winter of simple life I will not describe in detail. It snowed and snowed and snowed. We were always shoveling snow, thawing out frozen pipes or troughs, nailing up new cracks in the barn which appeared mysteriously overnight, continually feeding animals and stoves, mending the windmill, repairing broken shovels and doing a thousand and one other things which have no part in the simple life. For two or three days at a time the roads were impassable to the mail carrier, and one day we lost even the telephone connection because a tree had blown across the wires. Then we might as well have been on the island of Juan Fernandez, and indeed the drifts of snow in the fields, in great swells and waves, with scuds of white frozen spindrift flying across them, gave us the sensation of being anchored in the midst of a sea with evergreen-covered islands rising in the distance. But like Crusoe, we became superior to nature. We learned to walk on snowshoes to the village for our mail, for mental food was necessary although the materials for physical subsistence were all within our four walls. We went out on skis (which the natives called "sky-eyes") while our horses fattened in the barn. Excitement was furnished by such simple things as the breaking of a snow-shovel, a flapping blind, a newly discovered crack in the barn, a smoky funnel, a frozen sinkspout, all calling for attention at the same time. No one who has ever lived in New York can be happy without excitement, but excitement is a relative matter.

Buying a Car.

With March comes in the pleasant Spring when little birds begin to sing, goes the old song, but our Spring did not begin until April, and for a month

generally have a way of getting what they want, and we got our radio outfit. It is a two-eared—no, I mean a four-eared—contraption, and we sit up on winter nights and listen in, for whatever we may hear. I use the word "listen" advisedly, for usually, when we get the thing keyed up to the right wave length and hear distinctly, it is something that does not particularly interest us. We hear some unknown orator say:

"Follow Rotarians! The message I bring you tonight is a universal one, and by means of this wonderful development of human mechanical genius which has eliminated space, my message will be transmitted—" and then there is a buzzing, a crackling, a fading out or a sudden stop of the speaker's voice and in a thin, metallic tone some one butts in with: "The State program of work on maternity and child welfare is one which can be taken up by—" and a shift in the direction of the wind or something else shuts off this orator, and after a snatch of jazz music there is a long period of silence.

The wife, who manipulates the switchboard, makes alternately cautious and frantic adjustments, finally ending with "I don't see what's the matter with this thing; it never acted so before."—a statement which I do not contradict, although I know it to be absolutely untrue. So I go to the door and look out toward the north. Near the pole there is an arching band of white, dotted by dark patches, and pencils of light shoot up and quiver for a moment behind the increasing aurora. I return to the room where the operator is still juggling with the keys of the switchboard. "Nothing doing; another show on tonight," I remark, and we wind the clock, put the screen about the open fireplace, bank the furnace fire and retire to the antique-furnished chamber, where in sweet, dreamless sleep we forget the complexities of the simple life.

With the last Winter in mind we vowed that we would never be so isolated again. To be sure, with the stock to be cared for, the paths to shovel, the windmill to operate, the furnace to care for, the mails to look after, the telephone to answer, the water supply to watch, the trips to the village for grain when the roads were passable, &c., &c., the life was far from monotonous. But our neighbors in the village were installing radio outfits. Friend wife thought it would be a great thing to "listen in" on some of the things that were going on in New York. She urged the advantages of the daily weather and market reports. My experience with weather reports had been that they generally told us what kind of weather we were having rather than what we were going to have, and as for market reports, we had nothing in particular to market, being merely a self-supporting entity. But wives, if they know their business,