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PART I.

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*THE FARMER AT HOME.*

THE new towns, or suburbs which spring up every year in the neighbourhood of London, are all built upon much the same plan. Whole streets of houses present exact duplicates of each other, even to the number of steps up to the front door and the position of the scraper. In the country, where a new farmhouse is erected about once in twenty years, the styles of architecture are as varied and as irregular as in town they are prim and uniform. The great mass of farmhouses are old, and some are very picturesque. There was a farmhouse I knew which was almost entitled to be taken as the type of an English rural homestead. It was built at a spot where the open wild down suddenly fell away into rich meadow land. Here there was a narrow steep-sided valley, or "combe"—and at the mouth of this, well sheltered on three sides from the north, the east, and north-eastern winds, stood the homestead. A

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spring arose some way behind, and close to the house widened into a pool which was still further enlarged by means of a dam, forming a small lake of the clearest water. This lake fed a mill-race lower down. The farmyard and rick-barton were a little way up the narrow valley, on one side of which there was a rookery. The house itself was built in the pure Elizabethan style; with mullioned windows, and innumerable gables roofed with tiles. Nor was it wanting in the traditions of the olden time. This fine old place was the homestead of a large farm comprising some of the best land of the district, both down and meadow. Another farmhouse, still used for that purpose, stands upon the wildest part of the down, and is built of flint and concrete. It was erected nearly three hundred years ago, and is of unusual size. The woodwork is all solid black oak, good enough for an earl's mansion.

These are specimens of the highest class of farmhouse. Immediately beneath them come the houses built in the early part of the present century. They vary in almost every architectural detail, and the materials differ in each county; but the general

arrangement is the same. They consist as it were of two distinct houses under one roof. The front is the dwelling-house proper, usually containing a kitchen, sitting-room, and parlour. The back contains the wood-house (coal-house now), the brewhouse—where the beer was brewed, which frequently also had an oven—and, most important of all, the dairy. All this part of the place is paved with stone flags, and the dairy is usually furnished with lattice-work in front of the windows, so that they can be left open to admit the cool air and not thieves. Coolness is the great requisite in a dairy, and some gentlemen who make farming a science go to the length of having a fountain of water constantly playing in it. These houses, however, were built before scientific agriculture was thought of. The wood-house contained the wood used for cooking and domestic purposes; for at that date wood was universally used in the country, and coal rarely seen. The wood was of course grown on the farm, for which purpose those wide double mound hedges, now rapidly disappearing, were made. It was considered a good arrange-

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ment to devote half-an-acre in some outlying portion of the farm entirely to wood, not only for the fire, but for poles, to make posts and rails, gates, ladders, &c. The coal could not in those days be conveyed so cheaply as it now is by railways. Such as was used had to be brought by the slow barges on the canals, or else was fetched by the farmers' waggons direct from the pit-mouth. The teams were not unfrequently absent two days and a night on the journey. In the outlying districts this difficulty in obtaining coal practically restricted the available fuel to wood. Now the wood-house is used as much for coal as wood. Of course the great stacks of wood—the piles of faggots and logs—were kept outside, generally in the same enclosure as the ricks, only a sufficient number for immediate use being kept under cover. The brewhouse was an important feature when all farmers brewed their own beer and baked their own bread. At present the great majority purchase their beer from the brewers, although some still brew large quantities for the labourers' drinking in harvest time. At a period when compara-

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tively little ready money passed between employer and employed, and the payment for work was made in kind, beer was a matter which required a great deal of the attention of the farmer, and absorbed no little of his time. At this day it is a disputed matter which is cheapest, to buy or to brew beer: at that time there was no question about it. It was indisputably economical to brew. The brewhouse was not necessarily confined to that use; when no brewing was in progress it was often made a kind of second dairy. Over these offices was the cheese-room. This was and still is a long, large, and lofty room in which the cheese after being made is taken to dry and harden. It is furnished with a number of shelves upon which the cheeses are arranged, and as no two can be placed one on the other in the early stage of their maturing, much space is required. It is the duty of the dairymaid and her assistant to turn these cheeses every morning—a work requiring some strength. In this part of the house are the servants' rooms. In front of the dairy and brewhouse is a paved court enclosed with a wall, and in this court it

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was not uncommon to find a well; or hog-tub, for the refuse of the dairy. Sometimes, but not often now, the pig-stye is just outside the wall which surrounds the court. In this court, too, the butter is generally churned, under a "skilling" which covers half of it. Here also the buckets are washed, and other similar duties performed. The labourers come here to receive their daily allowance of beer.

Most farmhouses in large arable farms were originally built so as to have a small dairy at the back; though there was a time when the arable farmer never thought of keeping a cow, and butter and cheese were unknown, except as luxuries, in his establishment. This was during the continuance of the Corn Laws, when everything was sacrificed to the one great object of growing wheat. It was not impossible in those days to find a whole parish (I know of one myself) in which there was not a single cow. Now the great object is meat, then it was corn. But at the time when most of the farmhouses were erected, the system of agriculture pursued was a judicious mixture of the dairy and the cornfield, so that very few old farmhouses

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exist which have not some form of dairy attached. In the corn-growing times, most of the verdant meadows now employed to graze cattle, or for producing hay, were ploughed up. This may be seen by the regular furrows, unmistakable evidences of the plough. When corn declined in price through the influx of foreign produce, the land was again laid down in grass, and most of it continues so till this hour. It might be roughly estimated that England now contains a third more meadow land than in the early part of the present century, notwithstanding the attempt to plough up the downs.

We now come to the third class of farmsteads—low thatched buildings, little better than large cottages, and indeed frequently converted into dwellings for labourers. These are generally found on small farms, and in districts where there are a number of small landed proprietors. These freeholders built houses according to their means. In process of time they were bought up by the great landowners, and the farms thrown together, when the houses were used for other purposes. Some may still be found, especially in dairy districts. In these the principal



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part of the house is usually the dairy, which absorbs at least half of the ground floor, and opens on the kitchen, in which the family sit, and in which their food is often cooked. The eaves of the house are low, and there are scarcely any appliances for comfort. The yeomen who originally lived in these places in all respects resembled the labourers with whom they ate and drank and held the most familiar intercourse. Their labourers even slept in the same bedrooms as the family. But these men, though they mingled so freely with the labourer, were his worst enemy. The little profit they made was entirely accumulated by careful economy. They were avaricious and penurious to the last degree, and grudged every halfpenny to the labouring man. They were, and the remnant of them still are, the determined opponent of all progress. The interior of some of these cottage-farmsteads, which still exist, is almost Dutch-like in simplicity and homeliness. The fireplace is of a vast size, fitted with antique iron dogs for burning wood, and on it swing the irons to sustain the great pot. On each side, right under the chimney, are seats, the ingle-nook of

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olden times. The chimney itself is very large, being specially built for the purpose of curing sides of bacon by smoking. The chimneypiece is ornamented with a few odd figures in crockery-ware, half-a-dozen old brass candlesticks, and perhaps a snuff-box or tobacco dish. The floor is composed of stone flags—apt to get slimy and damp when the weather is about to change—and the wide chinks between them are filled with hardened dirt. In the centre there is a piece of carpet on which the table stands, but the rest of the room is bare of carpeting, except the hearth-rug. The low window has a seat let into the wall under it. The furniture of the apartment is utilitarian in the strictest sense. There is nothing there for ornament or luxury, or even for ease; only what is absolutely necessary. Generally there is a dresser, above which, on shelves, the dishes and plates are arranged. A tall upright eight-day clock, with a brazen face, and an inscription which tells that it was manufactured in a neighbouring village, stands in one corner, and solemnly ticks in its coffin-like panelled case. On each side of the fireplace there is an arm-chair, often cushioned