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Ars Agricolaris

An Ode of Moral Sentiments
Addressed to Certain Farmer-Gents

BY

HENRY VAN DYKE

Read at the Farmer's Dinner
University Club, Jan. 23, 1913

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Ars Agricolaris

By Henry Van Dyke

ALL hail, ye famous Farmers!
Ye vegetable-charmers,
Who know the art of making barren earth
Smile with prolific mirth
And bring forth twins or triplets at a birth!
Ye scientific fertilizers of the soil,
And horny-handed sons of toil!
To-night from all your arduous cares
released,
With manly brows no longer sweat-
impearled,
Ye hold your annual feast,

And like the Concord farmers long ago,
Ye meet above the "Bridge" below,
And draw the cork heard round the world!

What memories are yours! What tales
Of triumph have your tongues rehearsed
Telling how ye have won your first
Potatoes from the stubborn mead
(Almost as many as ye sowed for seed!)

And how the luscious cabbages and kails
Have bloomed before you in their bed
At seven dollars a head!
And how your onions took a prize
For bringing tears into the eyes
Of a hard-hearted cook! And how ye slew
The Dragon Cut-worm at a stroke!
And how ye broke,

Routed, and put to flight the horrid crew
Of vile potato-bugs and Hessian flies!

And how ye did not quail

Before the invading armies of San Jose Scale,

But met them bravely with your little pail

Of poison which ye put upon each tail

O'the dreadful beasts and made their cour-
age fail!

And how ye did acquit yourselves like
men

In fields of agricultural strife, and then,

Like generous warriors, sat you down
at ease

And gently to your gardener said "Let
us have *Pease!*"

But *were* here Pease? Ah, no, dear
Farmers, no!

The course of Nature is not ordered so.

For when we want a vegetable most,
She holds it back;
And when in boast
To our week-endly friends
Of what we'll give them on our farm,
alack,
Those things the old dam, Nature, never
sends.
O Pease in bottles, Sparrow-grass in jars,
How often have ye saved from scars
Of shame, and deep embarrassment,
The disingenuous farmer-gent,
To whom some wondering guest has
cried,
"How *do* you raise such Pease and Spar-
row-grass ?
Whereat the farmer-gent has not denied
The compliment, but smiling has replied,

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“To raise such things you must have lots
of glass.”

From wiles like these, true Farmers, hold
aloof;

Accept no praise unless you have the proof.

If niggard Nature should withhold the green

And sugary Pea, welcome the humble Bean;

Give it the place of honor at your table.

Even the easy Radish, and the Beet,

If grown by your own toil, are extra sweet!

Let malefactors of great wealth and banker-
felons

Rejoice in foreign artichokes, imported
melons;

But you, my Farmers, at your frugal board,

Spread forth the fare your Sabine Farms
afford.

Say to Maecenas, when he is your guest,
“No peaches, try this turnip, ’tis my best.”
Thus shall ye learn from labors in the field
What honesty a farmer’s life may yield,
And like G. Washington in early youth,
Though cherries fail, produce a crop of
Truth.

But think me not too strict, O fellows of the
plough,
Some place for fiction in your lives I would
allow.

In January when the world is drear,
And bills come in, and no results appear,
And snow-storms veil the skies,
And ice the streamlet clogs,
Then you may warm your heart with pleas-
ant lies,

And revel in the seedman's catalogues.
What visions and what dreams are there!
Of cauliflowers obese,-
Of giant celery, taller than a mast,-
Of strawberries
Like red pincushions, round and vast,-
Of succulent and spicy gumbo,-
Of cantaloupes, as big as jumbo,-
Of high-strung beans without the strings,-
And of a host of other wild romantic things!

Oh, why should Starr declare
That modern habits mental force impair?
And why should H. Marquand complain
That jokes as good as his will ne'er come
again?
And why should Bridges wear a gloomy
mien

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About the lack of fiction for his Magazine?
The seedman's catalogue is all we need
To stir our dull imaginations
To new creations,
And lead us, by the hand
Of Hope, into a fairy-land.

So dream, my friendly Farmer, as you will;
And let your fancy all your gardens fill
With wondrous crops; but always recollect
That Nature gives us less than we expect.
Scorn not the city where you earn the wealth
That, spent upon your farms, renews your
health;
And tell your wife, whene'er the bills have
shocked her,
"A country place is cheaper than a doctor."
May roses bloom for you and may you find
Your richest harvest in a tranquil mind.

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