

# VINTAGE WORDS OF WISDOM

## The COTTAGE FARM

Month by Month

BY

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*Our life is but a little holding, lent*

*To do a mighty labour: we are one*

*With heaven and the stars when it is spent*

*To serve God's aims: else die we with the sun*

*GEORGE MEREDITH*

The painting on the cover is *Farm Scene* by Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot.

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## PUBLISHERS' FOREWORD

This Vintage Words of Wisdom title, published in 1912, provides us with a charming evocation of life on an English smallholding at the beginning of the twentieth century. Describing the farming year month by month, the author offers us a vivid picture of the daily challenges and joys he experiences. There are moments of humour and sadness, protests about government policy and the behaviour of the local hunt, as well as reflections on the natural world.

We are not sure where Mr Green's smallholding is located (he mentions Winterslow, which is not far from Salisbury in Wiltshire) but it must be a beautiful part of the world. Mr Green waxes lyrical on the flora and fauna he sees in the countryside as the seasons change:

Under the bridal plume of a blackthorn branch four baby thrushes were about to essay their flight into the world. In the hazel bush, with exquisite beauty, a chaffinch had fashioned a dream-nest of glittering green moss delicately lined with white down. At every step kingcups, holding captive the golden light of the sun, offered a feast for the eyes.

The smallholding is actually not that small for Mr Green grows a wide range of crops, orchard fruit, soft fruit and vegetables, and he has cows (his beloved Kerries), chickens (White Orpingtons), pigs and bees. He is ably supported by Tommy the cart horse, Two Bob the dog and the curmudgeonly and picaresque Snowey, whose lurchers 'have a nose for a rabbit'.

Some of the challenges Mr Green faces in 1912 are surprisingly familiar today. He fears that Isle of Wight disease (a mystery and highly infectious disease in bees first identified in 1904 - similar to Colony Collapse Disorder) is spreading over the South of England. Unseasonal weather damages his crops, and lack of capital and cooperation means he doesn't have access to the agricultural machinery that would make his farm so much more efficient and productive. This certainly isn't a description of *The Good Life*, but there were clearly many compensations.

This charming book is full of practical advice and words of wisdom. Mr Green tells us about profitable varieties of fruit and vegetables, how to look after chickens in order to get them to lay well, and proffers advice on fertilizer, caring for bees in winter and many other things besides. Snowey is also prone to gnomic utterances on matters agricultural. He resents 'academic' advice - "But them there perfessers ain't no good," he would declare with scorn. "*They* only write books. *I knows.*" - preferring to rely on the wisdom handed down over centuries from labourer to labourer's son.

We have illustrated the chapters with paintings that reflect rural life in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. However, the most vivid images are provided by Mr Green:

Though this is a flowery month, neither roses nor sweet peas flank my pathway; but under the shadow of the hawthorn hedge, still glorious with blossoms, I hear the cool "swish, swish" of the scythe as it slips through the lush grass, and into my cottage window already steals the fragrance of new-mown hay. This is the special, entrancing scent of June, as the "chuck, chuck" of the blackbird strikes for me its particular note of sultry days.

This book is for all those who enjoy the rural life, who hanker after moving to the country and having their own smallholding, and for anyone who enjoys reading nostalgic descriptions of days gone by in the English countryside. As the book is short it won't detain you long but it will leave a lasting impression of country lives lived in the golden years just before the First World War.

## VINTAGE WORDS OF WISDOM

The Vintage Words of Wisdom titles are not simply facsimiles of old books. They have been carefully selected and professionally produced as high quality ebooks. Our aim is to make the best vintage books on popular topics of interest more widely available again. The books range from practical titles that include wisdom from times past to unashamedly nostalgic works that will appeal to those who may remember these or similar titles from their childhood. Often amusing and quaint, these vintage volumes also contain wise words and advice that may have been forgotten in the intervening years. So often it is worth revisiting the past to remind ourselves that the best ideas stand the test of time. Above all, the Vintage Words of Wisdom titles are highly entertaining and provide a fascinating snapshot of life in days gone by. We have chosen books with wonderful illustrations, exciting stories of daring and adventure, practical advice and charming nostalgic descriptions of a simpler life.

Titles include:

*Poultry-keeping*

*Room and Window Gardening*

*Ferns and Fern Culture*

*Woodwork Tools and How to Use Them*

*Home Carpentry: A Practical Guide for the Amateur*

*The Boys' Book of Aeroplanes*

*The Railway Age*

*Sky Roads of the World* (Amy Johnson's autobiography)

*Lillie London's Needlework Book*

*The Cottage Farm Month by Month*

For further details and the most up-to-date information on our titles please visit our website

[www.wordstothewise.co.uk](http://www.wordstothewise.co.uk)

## I

### JANUARY

**J**ANUARY is no “dead” month as it is commonly averred. Even with its face hardset against wind and frost, the ploughed land on the bleak upland is abloom with the winter wheat, an earnest of the greening of the woods. The Creative Spirit is astir. The Drama of Life goes on though the stage be cleared of many a combatant; and it is none the less vital to each left to face the New Year.

When I first started to farm, I wrote to a relation, who tilled his own land in Norfolk, asking him to write me out a calendar of the likely happenings month by month. Against the month of January he wrote the caustic sentence, “Go to bed and stay there.” But then he lorded it over three hundred acres, which is rather a different matter from that of trying to wrest a living out of twenty acres. There was little for him to do, except to look down the barrel of his gun, or perhaps to see that everything was ready in the sheepfold for lambing, whilst the team-man, the ploughman, the cowman, and other farm hands performed the daily round of farm duties. The small holder, though, has to do every job himself, and January may be as full of work, whether the earth be iron-bound by frost or not, as any other month.

Milking and digging begin, if not in the dark, at an hour when the dawn comes like a dusky beauty before she lifts her veil to the kiss of the sun. Is ever the sunlight in summer as lovely as it is on a clear January morning, when it floods the meadows with a dancing light, strikes aslant the lichened boles of oaks, or when it irradiates the underwings of a flock of plovers as they turn in their flight, flashing like herrings in a net? Can any month be said to be “dead” which brings us troupes of bustling starlings, glistening as if they had preened their wings at the edge of the rainbow?

This morning, as I walked down the hoarfrosted meadow to break the ice in the pond, a heron flew up within a few yards of me. Never before have I watched a heron so closely. With a heavy, languorous flight it rose above the bushes overhanging the pond, and ponderously swung round by the stream, winging its way back to the great ponds a mile away.

They say that the visit of a “jack-hurn” foretells a storm; but surely we have had our fill of wind and rain this winter. The hurricane in late December which swept over our hilltop holding left behind it indelible remembrances of its Pagan outburst. In its Viking fury it tossed one henhouse full of fowls some yards away, and for the first time in my experience I had a hive full of bees spilled upon the ground. Curiously enough, a quilt was blown over the frames with their adhering bees, and in the morning the bees were put back alive into the hive. The high ritual of this passion-play of Boreas reached its straining point in the newly planted orchard, where apple and plum trees genuflected at an angle of thirty degrees. The large kennel in which my dog “Two Bob” sleeps was blown like a boat at sea against the breakwater of the red shed. But “Two Bob” stuck gallantly to his ship, and though it was lying on its side, I found him in the morning sleeping inside it the deep sleep of the weary.

Tommy, the cob, has at last to be stabled.