

The Country Boy
Chapter 4 from the book
Pushing to the Front (873 total pages)
by Orison Swett Marden

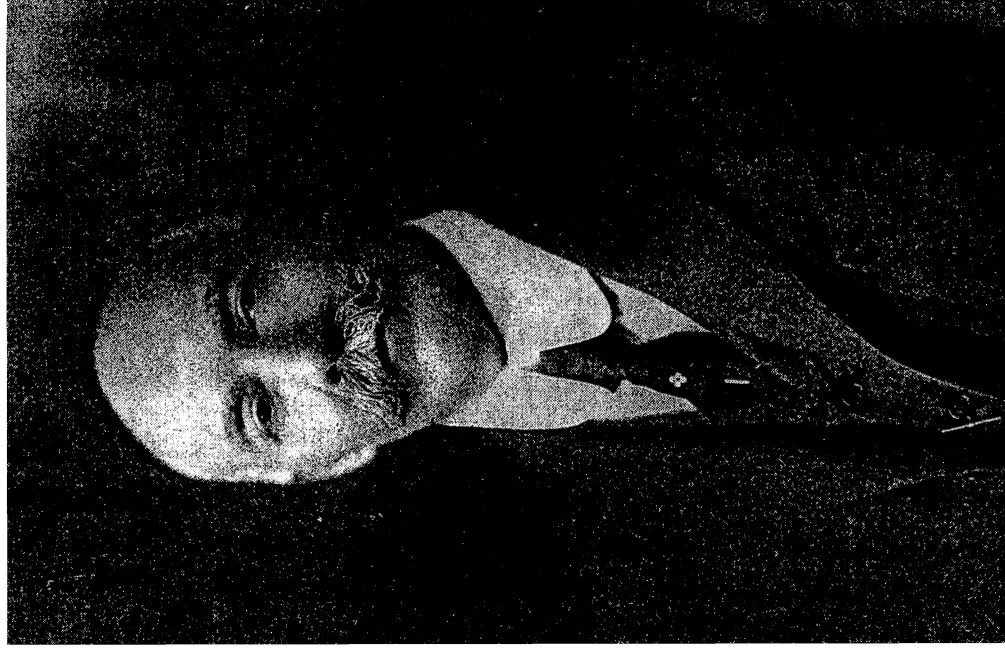
Orison Swett Marden (1850-1924), founder of *Success Magazine*, is also considered to be the founder of the modern success movement in America. He certainly bridged the gap between the old, narrow notions of success and the new, more comprehensive models made popular by best-selling authors such as Napoleon Hill, Clement Stone, Dale Carnegie, Og Mandino, Earl Nightingale, Norman Vincent Peale, and today's authors Stephen R. Covey, Anthony Robbins, and Brian Tracy.

He was the son of poor parents, born on a New England farm in 1850. He attended Boston University, and also Andover Theological Seminary. Graduating from Boston University in 1871, he took an M.D. at Harvard in 1881, an LL.B. degree, also at Harvard, in 1882.

Marden's first book, *Pushing to the Front*, published in 1894, had a phenomenal circulation. In 1897 he founded *Success Magazine*, which reached the enormous circulation, for that time, of nearly a half-million. This publication ran into financial difficulties and suspended publication in 1912. But once again, in 1918, he founded a new *Success* which was rapidly climbing in circulation when death ended his career, in 1924.

An internet search on google.com for Orison Swett Marden turned up thousands of hits. A more detailed biography and a list of thirty of Marden's books available to be purchased on: <http://website.lineone.net/~cornerstone/marden>

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Orison S. Marden

with pleasure. He can not rid himself of its fascination until he tastes its emptiness. He can not know the worth of the country and how to appreciate the glory of its disadvantages and opportunities until he has seen the sham and shallowness of the city.

One of the greatest boons that can ever come to a human being is to be born on a farm and reared in the country. Self-reliance and grit are oftenest country-bred. The country boy is constantly thrown upon his own resources, forced to think for himself, and this calls out his ingenuity and inventiveness. He develops better all-round judgment and a more level head than the city boy. His muscles are harder, his flesh firmer, and his brain-fiber partakes of the same superior quality.

The very granite hills, the mountains, the valleys, the brooks, the miracle of the growing crops are every moment registering their mighty potencies in his constitution, putting iron into his blood and stamina into his character, all of which will help to make him a giant when he comes to compete with the city-bred youth.

The sturdy, vigorous, hardy qualities, the stamina, the brawn, the grit which characterize men who do great things in this world, are, as a rule, country bred. If power is not absorbed from the soil, it certainly comes from very near it. There seems to be a close connection between robust character and the soil, the hills, mountains and valleys, the pure air and sunshine. There is a very appreciable difference between the physical stamina, the brain vigor, the solidity and the reliability of country-bred men and that of those in the city.

The average country-bred youth has a better foundation for success-building, has greater courage, more moral stamina. He has not become weakened and softened by the superficial ornamental, decorative in-

CHAPTER IV

THE COUNTRY BOY

THE Napoleonic wars so drained the flower of French manhood that even to-day the physical stature of the average Frenchman is nearly half an inch below what it was at the beginning of Napoleon's reign.

The country in America to-day is constantly paying a similar tribute to the city in the sacrifice of its best blood, its best brain, the finest physical and mental fiber in the world. This great stream of superb country manhood, which is ever flowing cityward, is rapidly deteriorated by the softening, emasculating influences of the city, until the superior virility, stamina and sturdy qualities entirely disappear in two or three generations of city life. Our city civilization is always in a process of decay, and would, in a few generations, become emasculated and effeminate were it not for the pure, crystal stream of country youth flowing steadily into and purifying the muddy, devitalized stream of city life. It would soon become so foul and degenerate as to threaten the physical and moral health of city dwellers.

One of our great men says that one of the most unfortunate phases of modern civilization is the drift away from the farm, the drift of country youth to the city which has an indescribable fascination for him. His vivid imagination clothes it with Arabian Nights possibilities and joys. The country seems tame and commonplace after his first dream of the city. To him it is synonymous with opportunity, with power,

fluences of city life. And there is a reason for all this. We are largely copies of our environment. We are under the perpetual influence of the suggestion of our surroundings. The city-bred youth sees and hears almost nothing that is natural, aside from the faces and forms of human beings. Nearly everything that confronts him from morning till night is artificial, man-made. He sees hardly anything that God made, that imparts solidity, strength and power, as do the natural objects in the country. How can a man build up a solid, substantial character when his eyes and ears bring him only sights and sounds of artificial things? A vast sea of business blocks, sky-scrapers and asphalt pavements does not generate character-building material.

Just as sculpture was once carried to such an extreme that pillars and beams were often so weakened by the extravagant carvings as to threaten the safety of the structure, so the timber in country boys and girls, when brought to the city, is often overcarved and adorned at the cost of strength, robustness and vigor.

In other words, virility, forcefulness, physical and mental stamina reach their maximum in those who live close to the soil. The moment a man becomes artificial in his living, takes on artificial conditions, he begins to deteriorate, to soften.

Much of what we call the best society in our cities is often in an advanced process of decay. The muscles may be a little more delicate but they are softer; the skin may be a little fairer, but it is not so healthy; the thought a little more supple, but less vigorous. The whole tendency of life in big cities is toward deterioration. City people rarely live really normal lives. It is not natural for human beings to live far from the soil. It is Mother Earth and country life that give vitality, stamina, courage and all the qualities which

make for manhood and womanhood. What we get from the country is solid, substantial, enduring, reliable. What comes from the artificial conditions of the city is weakening, enervating, softening.

The country youth, on the other hand, is in the midst of a perpetual miracle. He can not open his eyes without seeing a more magnificent painting than a Raphael or a Michael Angelo could have created in a lifetime. And this magnificent panorama is changing every instant.

There is a miracle going on in every growing blade of grass and flower. Is it not wonderful to watch the chemical processes in nature's laboratory, mixing and flinging out to the world the gorgeous colorings and marvelous perfumes of the rose and wild flower! No city youth was ever in such a marvelous kindergarten, where perpetual creation is going on in such a vast multitude of forms.

The city youth has too many things to divert his attention. Such a multiplicity of objects appeals to him that he is often superficial; he lacks depth; his mind is perpetually drawn away from his subject, and he lacks continuity of thought and application. His reading is comparatively superficial. He glances through many papers, magazines and periodicals and gives no real thought to any. His evenings are much more broken up than those of the country boy, who, having very little diversion after supper, can read continuously for an entire evening on one subject. The country boy does not read as many books as the city boy, but, as a rule, he reads them with much better results.

The dearth of great libraries, books and periodicals is one reason why the country boy makes the most of good books and articles, often reading them over and over again, while the city youth, in the midst of newspapers and libraries, sees so many books that in most

instances he cares very little for them, and will often read the best literature without absorbing any of it.

The fact is that there is such a diversity of attractions and distractions, of temptation and amusement in the city, that unless a youth is made of unusual stuff he will yield to the persuasion of the moment and follow the line of least resistance. It is hard for the city-bred youth to resist the multiplicity of allurements and pleasures that bid for his attention, to deny himself and turn a deaf ear to the appeals of his associates and tie himself down to self-improvement while those around him are having a good time.

These exciting, diverting, tempting conditions of city life are not conducive to generating the great master purpose, the one unwavering life aim, which we often see so marked in the young man from the country. Nor do city-bred youths store up anything like the reserve power, the cumulative force, the stamina, which are developed in the simple life of the soil.

For one thing, the country boy is constantly developing his muscular system. His health is better. He gets more exercise, more time to think and to reflect; hence, he is not so superficial as the city boy. His perceptions are not so quick, he is not so rapid in his movements, his thought action is slower and he does not have as much polish, it is true, but he is better balanced generally. He has been forced to do a great variety of work and this has developed corresponding mental qualities.

The drudgery of the farm, the chores which we hated as boys, the rocks which we despised, we have found were the very things which educated us, which developed our power and made us practical. The farm is a great gymnasium, a superb manual training school, nature's kindergarten, constantly calling upon the youth's self-reliance and inventiveness. He must

make the implements and toys which he can not afford to buy or procure. He must run, adjust and repair all sorts of machinery and farm utensils. His ingenuity and inventiveness are constantly exercised. If the wagon or plow breaks down it must be repaired on the spot, often without the proper tools. This training develops instinctive courage, strong success qualities, and makes him a resourceful man.

Is it any wonder that the boy so trained in self-reliance, so superbly equipped with physical and mental stamina, should take such pre-eminence, should be in such demand when he comes to the city? Is it any wonder that he is always in evidence in great emergencies and crises? Just stand a stamina-filled, self-reliant country boy beside a pale, soft, stamina-less, washed-out city youth. Is it any wonder that the country-bred boy is nearly always the leader; that he heads the banks, the great mercantile houses? It is this peculiar, indescribable something; this superior stamina and mental caliber, that makes the stuff that rises to the top in all vocations.

There is a peculiar quality of superiority which comes from dealing with *realities* that we do not find in the superficial city conditions. The life-giving oxygen, breathed in great inspirations through constant muscular effort, develops in the country boy much greater lung power than is developed in the city youth, and his outdoor work tends to build up a robust constitution. Plowing, hoeing, mowing, everything he does on the farm gives him vigor and strength. His muscles are harder, his flesh firmer, and his brain-fiber partakes of the same superior quality. He is constantly bottling up forces, storing up energy in his brain and muscles which later may be powerful factors in shaping the nation's destiny or which may furnish backbone to keep the ship of state from foundering on the rocks. This marvelous reserve power which he stores up in

the country will come out in the successful banker, statesman, lawyer, merchant, or business man.

Self-reliance and grit are oftenest country-bred. The country boy is constantly thrown upon his own resources; he is forced to think for himself, and this calls out his ingenuity and makes him self-reliant and strong. It has been found that the use of tools in our manual training schools develops the brain, strengthens the deficient faculties and brings out latent powers. The farm-reared boy is in the best manual training school in the world and is constantly forced to plan things, make things; he is always using tools. This is one of the reasons why he usually develops better all-round judgment and a more level head than the city boy.

It is human nature to exaggerate the value of things beyond our reach. People save money for years in order to go to Europe to visit the great art centers and see the famous masterpieces, when they have really never seen the marvelous pictures painted by the Divine Artist and spread in the landscape, in the sunset, in the glory of flowers and plant life, right at their very doors.

What a perpetual inspiration, what marvels of beauty, what miracles of coloring are spread everywhere in nature, confronting us on every hand! We see them almost every day of our lives and they become so common that they make no impression upon us. Think of the difference between what a Ruskin sees in a landscape and the impression conveyed to his brain, and what is seen by the ordinary mind, the ordinary person who has little or no imagination and whose esthetic faculties have scarcely been developed!

We are immersed in a wilderness of mysteries and marvelous beauties. Miracles innumerable in grass and flower and fruit are performed right before our eyes. How marvelous is Nature's growing of fruit,

for example! How she packs the concentrated sunshine and delicious juices into the cans that she makes as she goes along, cans exactly the right size, without a particle of waste, leakage or evaporation, with no noise of factories, no hammering of tins! The miracles are wrought in a silent laboratory; not a sound is heard, and yet what marvels of skill, deliciousness and beauty!

What interrogation points, what wonderful mysteries, what wit-sharpeners are ever before the farmer boy, whichever way he turns! Where does all this tremendous increase of corn, wheat, fruit and vegetables come from? There seems to be no loss to the soil, and yet, what a marvelous growth in everything! Life, life, more life on every hand! Wherever he goes he treads on chemical forces which produce greater marvels than are described in the Arabian Nights. The trees, the brooks, the mountains, the hills, the valleys, the sunsets, the growing animals on the farm, are all mysteries that set him thinking and to wondering at the creative processes which are working on every hand.

Then again, the delicious freedom of it all, as contrasted with the cramped, artificial life in the city! Everything in the country tends to set the boy thinking, to call out his dormant powers and develop his latent forces. And what health there is in it all! How hearty and natural he is in comparison with the city boy, who is tempted to turn night into day, to live an artificial, purposeless life.

The very temptation in the city to turn night into day is of itself health-undermining, stamina-dissipating and character-weakening.

While the city youth is wasting his precious energy capital in late hours, pleasure seeking, and often dissipation, the country youth is storing up power and vitality; he is being recharged with physical force by

natural, refreshing sleep, away from the distracting influence and enervating excitement of city life. The country youth does not learn to judge people by the false standards of wealth and social standing. He is not inculcated with snobbish ideas. Everything in the great farm kindergarten teaches him sincerity, simplicity and honesty.

The time was when the boy who gave no signs of genius or unusual ability was consigned to the farm, and the brilliant boy was sent to college or to the city to make a career for himself. But we are now beginning to see that man has made a botch of farming only because he looked upon it as a sort of humdrum occupation; as a means provided by nature for living-getting for those who were not good for much else. Farming was considered by many people as a sort of degrading occupation desirable only for those who lacked the brains and education to go into a profession or some of the more refined callings. But the searchlight of science has revealed in it possibilities hitherto undreamed of. We are commencing to realize that it takes a high order of ability and education to bring out the fullest possibilities of the soil; that it requires fine-grained sympathetic talent. We are now finding that agriculture is as great a science as astronomy, and that ignorant men have been getting an indifferent living from their farms simply because they did not know how to mix brains with the soil.

The science of agriculture is fast becoming appreciated and is more and more regarded as a high and noble calling, a dignified profession. Think of what it means to go into partnership with the Creator in bringing out larger, grander products from the soil; to be able to co-operate with that divine creative force, and even to vary the size, the beauty, the perfume of flowers; to enlarge, modify and change the flavor of fruits and vegetables to our liking!



HOUSE IN WHICH ABRAHAM LINCOLN WAS BORN

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Think what it must mean to be a magician in the whole vegetable kingdom, like Luther Burbank, changing colors, flavors, perfumes, species! Almost anything is possible when one knows enough and has heart and sympathy enough to enter into partnership with the great creative force in nature. Mr. Burbank says that the time will come when man will be able to do almost anything he wishes in the vegetable kingdom; will be able to produce at will any shade or color he wishes, and almost any flavor in any fruit; that the size of all fruits and vegetables and flowers is just a matter of sufficient understanding, and that Nature will give us almost anything when we know enough to treat her intelligently, wisely and sympathetically.

The history of most great men shows that there is a disadvantage in having too many advantages.

Who can tell what the consequences would have been had Lincoln been born in New York and educated at Harvard? If he had been reared in the midst of great libraries, brought up in an atmosphere of books, of only a small fraction of which he could get even a superficial knowledge, would he have had that insatiable hunger which prompted him to walk twenty miles in order to borrow Blackstone's "Commentaries" and to read one hundred pages on the way home?

What was there in that rude frontier forest, where this poor boy scarcely ever saw any one who knew anything of books, to rouse his ambition and to stimulate him to self-education? Whence came that yearning to know the history of men and women who had made a nation; to know the history of his country? Whence came that passion to devour the dry statutes of Indiana, as a young girl would devour a love story? Whence came that all-absorbing ambition to be somebody in the world; to serve his country with no selfish

ambition? Had his father been rich and well-educated instead of a poor man who could neither read nor write and who was generally of a shiftless and roving disposition, there is no likelihood that Lincoln would ever have become the powerful man he was.

Had he not felt that imperious "must" calling him, the prod of necessity spurring him on, whence would have come the motive which led him to struggle for self-development, self-unfoldment? If he had been born and educated in luxury, his character would probably have been soft and flabby in comparison with what it was.

Where in all the annals of history is there another record of one born of such poor parentage and reared in such a wretched environment, who ever rose to such eminence? Imagine a boy of to-day, so hungry for an education that he would walk nine miles a day to attend a rude frontier school in a log cabin! What would the city boys of to-day, who do not want to walk even a few blocks to school, think of a youth who would do what Lincoln did to overcome his handicap?