

GENTLEMEN'S SONS



AS WESTERN "HIRED MEN"

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"TO GENTLEMEN'S SONS.—A practical American farmer is prepared to take young English gentlemen as farm pupil. Small premium. Scientific instruction in agriculture and stock-raising."



HIS is the style of advertisement which lures many a poor but ambitious scion of the British aristocracy to the farm lands of our Western states. There is something rather fascinating in a contemplation of the inducements it seems to hold out to its readers.

Vast possibilities open up before the mind of the young Englishman as he reads it. It is not so much the idea of becoming a farm pupil that attracts him. That is, of course, only a sort of probationary period—a means to an end. Away beyond those necessary two, three, or four years to be spent in learning the science of farming, there stretches before his imagination the vista of the not very distant future, when, having taken advantage of the important knowledge he shall have gained, and the very low prices of Western soil, he sees himself a landed proprietor. To his enchanted vision there appear acres and acres of wheat and oats and barley waiting to be gathered into the granaries, while out on the hills are grazing his numberless flocks and herds.

Altogether, it is an enticing prospect to the sons of the gentry, so the poor clergyman, the barrister, the baronet, and sometimes even the earl, advise their sons to emigrate. The

young men take ship for the other side, carrying with them those wonderful air-castles, the foundations of which receive a very rude shaking on their arrival at the little country "depôt" in Wisconsin, Minnesota, or the wilds of the still farther West. Their preconceived notions concerning the manner of man who shall undertake to instruct them in the mysteries of "scientific farming" turn out to be of a very ideal nature indeed when they behold the real Western farmer, who meets them in a "lumber-waggon" or a "bob sleigh," according to the season of the year. "Give us a lift with this here baggage," he says to the young aristocrats, who up to that time have never so much as attempted to carry their Gladstone bags, and then, somehow, the walls of the air-castles cave in completely, and the young men long for "Merry England"—*how* very merry they never before realised!

My acquaintance with the American system of receiving gentlemen's sons as farm pupils dates back to my earliest "district school" days. I remember very well the first pupil who made his appearance in our neighbourhood. It was an event which set all the simple farming people for three miles around to talking. We children heard of it one day at recreation time. We stopped short in the midst of our exciting game of "London Bridge is falling down" when one of our playfellows announced that his father had got a new "hired man all the way from England." The arrival of any new-comer in the neighbourhood would have been a subject for long and animated conversation amongst us, but a new "hired man" from across the sea! That, indeed, was a matter to draw out all our childish eagerness and curiosity, so we plied the bearer of this strange intelligence with various questions.

"Yes," said the boy, "he came 'way over

the ocean to get a job on our farm, and father says that if all John Bulls is as stupid as his ludship he don't want no more of 'em!"

Then followed a graphic description of the new "hired man" and all his vagaries. It seemed he was designated "his ludship" because he boasted of a relation who had married an earl. His "stupidity" had first been glaringly shown by the particular style of apparel which he had donned when, the day following his arrival at the farm, he had gone out into the field to tell Farmer Jackson that he was ready for his first "lesson" in ploughing. Striped trousers, fancy waistcoat, cutaway coat, light gaiters, and a "top" hat helped to make up his outfit. Farmer Jackson's first exclamation was: "Wa'al, I never see the likes!" and the frightened aristocrat had fled precipitately into the barn-yard.

As time went on, "his ludship," as he became familiarly known in all the country around, developed other idiosyncrasies. Although he consented to adopt a "ticking" jacket, blue "over-alls," cowhide boots, and a large-brimmed straw hat, he steadfastly refused to take his farming lessons in ungloved hands, on the plea that he was afraid of getting callous spots. At breakfast he frequently asked for dry toast and a slice of bacon, refusing to partake of the fried mutton or pork, which appealed to the appetites of the other members of the family; and one day at supper he had asked for a fish-knife, a thing of which none of the Jackson family had any knowledge!

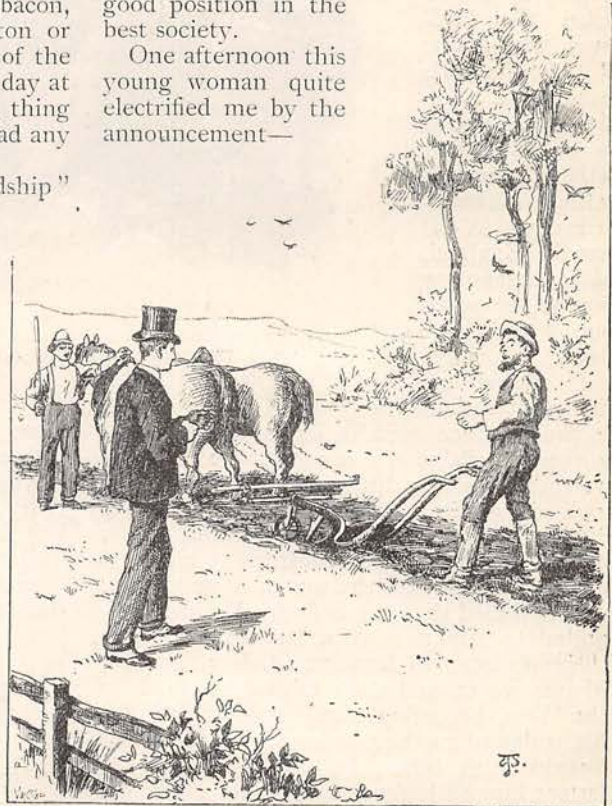
Two years went by, and "his ludship" became more accustomed to his surroundings. The neighbours began to criticise Farmer Jackson, declaring that it was "scandalous" for him to attempt to run his eighty-acre farm without any help except that of the young Englishman. It became noised about that "his ludship" was not, after all, a genuine "hired man," but a young gentleman sent over by his father to learn farming, in order that he might afterwards become a landowner, and that for his "instructions" Farmer Jackson had received five hundred dollars in advance. Then suddenly this new sort of "hired man" disappeared from the neighbourhood, and we heard no more about him. Farmer Jackson expressed himself as glad that the term of instruction had ended, since he had not been able to "larn that dude anything," although he had spent a great deal

of very valuable time upon him. But he neglected to make any mention of the fact that he had saved a considerable outlay that would otherwise have been necessary for farm help.

A few years later, when I had almost forgotten the circumstance of Farmer Jackson's peculiar kind of English "hired man," I spent some months in another part of the Western country, where I made further discoveries concerning the farm pupil system, which my increased years and wisdom rendered it easier for me to understand.

I there made the acquaintance of a wealthy farmer's daughter, whose father had given her every educational advantage, which, however, had apparently done little towards adding to her intelligence or refinement. Despite the fact that she had spent six years at a fashionable young ladies' seminary, which had the reputation of "finishing" its pupils in such a way as to prepare them for the best society, this young woman had turned out a complete failure. She was still uncultivated, uneducated, and ungrammatical; but her doting father failed to perceive this, and now his one ambition was to have her married to a man who held a good position in the best society.

One afternoon this young woman quite electrified me by the announcement—



"WA'AL, I NEVER SEE THE LIKES!"

"I want to introduce you to our hired man!"

"Introduce me to your hired man!" I exclaimed in amazement; for somehow, the idea of being introduced to one of her father's labouring men shocked even my very democratic susceptibilities.

"Yes, of course," she answered, enjoying my discomfiture. "I intend to marry him!"

"Marry him! You are going to marry a hired man? Does your father know it?" I asked, more than ever convinced of the girl's innate vulgarity.

"Well, I guess he does; it's his idea. You see, he's not an American hired man. He's an Englishman, with a pedigree as long as your arm. He's been helping father, so as to learn the business, you know. But I guess he won't have to do that after we're married, for father's going to settle on me handsomely. We'll live in England, and I'll make my bow to the queen one of these fine days."

I offered no further objections

to the proposed introduction, and I made the young Englishman's acquaintance. There was certainly very little of the "hired man" look about him. Indeed, he was the most distinguished and fashionable-looking young man it had ever been my fortune to meet. I learned that he was the son of a clergyman, who had died the year before. He had emigrated to America as a farm pupil, with the expectation of learning all about farming in two years, and then taking up land in the West, becoming rich, and sending for his widowed mother to come and share his fortune with him. In the meantime the farmer himself had proposed to his pupil that he marry his daughter and in that way recuperate his fortunes; and the young fellow,

having become discouraged after taking a few "lessons" in farming, had fallen in with the proposition.

But events proved that the farmer's daughter was not destined to shine in English society, as she had so fondly hoped. Two months later the widowed mother, wishing to see what manner of heiress her son was about to marry, paid an unexpected visit to his *fiancée*, with the result that the engagement was broken off, and there was one less farm pupil in the neighbourhood.

In that county and in the adjoining one there was quite a large colony of English gentlemen's sons who were making their homes with the farmers. They had all come over to learn farming, expecting to receive such instructions as could only be given in our agricultural colleges. The premiums they had paid ranged all the way from fifty to one hundred and fifty pounds. There was something truly pathetic, and at the same time ludicrous, in the position of

these farm pupils. When they left their native England their ideas of the meaning of a Western farmer were based on their observations of large landed proprietors in Great Britain. To their minds a man who owned land must be a very different sort of person from a man who tilled the soil. Imagine, then, their amazement, on arriving at their destination, to find that their "instructor" was to be no other than a horny-handed son of toil, who ploughed and planted and gathered in his own grain, assisted, when necessary, by the sons of neighbouring farmers, or strong men from another part of the country, who worked out by the month, and were known as "hired men." Little did they think that their own advent would in some cases do



"YOU ARE GOING TO MARRY A HIRED MAN?"

away with the necessity of such assistants—in fact, that they themselves would develop into a species of "hired man," who not only worked without wages, but paid for the privilege of working!

The taking of pupils was confined almost exclusively to the less prosperous members of the farming community. With the exception of the case I have cited, where the rich farmer took a pupil in the hope of obtaining an aristocratic husband for his daughter, all of the "instructors" in "scientific farming" were men of an economical turn of mind, who were under the impression that by receiving two or three pupils they could dispense with the necessity of keeping regular farm servants, who demanded good wages and possessed monstrous appetites. A good many of the premiums sent over from England went towards paying off various mortgages on the farms or stock. Agreements were entered into by which the pupil promised to remain with the "instructor" for a year, two years, or three years. In consideration of the premium, he was to receive board and lodging and *practical* lessons in all that pertained to farm work. The farmers were very conscientious indeed so far as the *practical* part of the lessons was concerned!

If the pupil arrived in the spring of the year, he was almost immediately set to ploughing and "dragging," and sowing and planting; and many were the amusing tales told concerning the first appearance of the "tenderfoot," as he was invariably called, on the scene of agricultural labour. There was certainly something incongruous in the sight of a tall young Englishman, carefully arrayed in a conspicuous black-and-white checked suit, a fancy necktie, "choker" collar, spotless cuffs fastened with link buttons, and a silk hat, making his way over the newly ploughed field, to announce that he was ready to take his first lesson in planting potatoes or setting out tobacco "sprouts." And later on in the season there was something rather pathetic in the changed appearance of that same young man, arrayed in brown or blue "overalls," coloured shirt with sleeves rolled up to the elbow, and large sun-hat, bending over potato-plants and knocking those dread enemies of the Western farmer, "potato-bugs," into a bent tin can with a stick. The delicate, white hands had by that time become brown and rough, as the result of the practical lessons. He had driven the cows to and from the pasture, been kicked over several times by the outraged animals, who objected to being milked on the "wrong side," carried the milk-pails to the farmer's wife in the pantry and strained milk into the pans she

indicated, carried "fodder" to the stock on the end of a pitchfork, fed the pigs, marked the eggs for sitting hens, and even been asked if he would object to "minding the baby" as it slept in its cradle, while the farmer's wife made a call on her "next-door" neighbour, a quarter of a mile up the road! All the lessons had been very practical indeed, though one might be in doubt as to whether there was any particular "science" about them.

If the pupil entered upon his course of instruction during the winter months, he was immediately put to doing "chores," which meant being a sort of "handy man" about the place. He helped the farmer in the mixing of the bran and water for the cows, shelling corn for the pigs, climbing up on a doubtfully secure ladder into the barn hay-loft to throw bales of hay to the horses, and carrying water from the well to the barn. In the winter most of the pumps needed to be "primed," a process which consisted of pouring into the top opening a pail of water always kept by, for the purpose of getting them into working order, so one of the duties of the pupil was to "prime the pump." Then there was wood to chop and saw, and "chips" to be picked up for the kindling of the morning kitchen fire, and he would also occasionally be asked to assist the farmer's wife in the churning.

Let it not be thought that the "instructor"



"HAD EVEN BEEN ASKED IF HE WOULD OBJECT TO MINDING THE BABY."



"THE YOUNG ENGLISHMAN SAWED THE WOOD."

looked upon his pupil as in any way "beneath" him, or required work from him which he himself was not willing to do, for if there is anything that farmers of the class I have described thoroughly believe in, it is perfect "equality." If the pupil "primed the pump" the instructor worked the handle. Both walked side by side to the barn, with a brimming wooden pail in each hand. If the young Englishman sawed the wood, the farmer was near at hand with his axe to split the short logs into pieces. Together they walked to and from the house in the frost-laden air, breathing icicles as they went; together they warmed their benumbed hands, chapped and cracked, over the bright kitchen fire, and together they breakfasted, dined, and supped in the same kitchen, the farmer plunging his knife into his mouth, the Englishman using the wooden-handled two-pronged steel fork to the best advantage possible, wishing the while that English roast beef might occasionally be substituted for American salt pork.

On Saturdays, instructor and pupil would walk through the snowdrifts to the village, two or three miles distant, taking with them

eggs and butter, which were to be "traded" at the miscellaneous shop for groceries and calicoes. In the same building was the post-office, where an occasional letter with an English post-mark would be handed out by the shopkeeper's daughter, who acted as postmistress. Perhaps in such letters there would be pleasant references to the good time coming when the "scientific" studies should be over, and the son or brother had become the owner of hundreds of acres of rich farming land in the West.

But as the weeks and the months dragged slowly on and finally the term of "study" came to an end, there were very few of the pupils who, after such experiences as I have described, felt any ambition to go on in the farming business and make even the slightest attempt at fulfilling their dreams of a few years before. The best that could be said for those whose strong physiques had enabled them to pass through the ordeal without injuring their health, was that they were now ready to take places as regular farm servants at wages ranging from twenty to forty dollars per month, with board and lodging found. Working in that way for a few years, they might lay by a sufficient sum of money to enable them to go out on the frontiers and "take up" land, working it themselves, perhaps—who knows?—with the help of their own countrymen as farm pupils!

The hardships of many young Englishmen who choose Canada instead of our Western states as the place in which to pursue their agricultural studies are said to be even more severe than those which I have described. The work is about the same, and the winters colder, and, in some instances, the sleeping accommodation supplied by the Canadian farmer to his pupils is very inferior to that enjoyed by such as take up their residence in the United States. I have been told by a young man, recently returned from Canada, that it is a common thing there for farming pupils to be obliged to spend their nights in the barn hay-loft or the second storey of the granary, with but a partition of boards to separate them from the outer world. Between the cracks of the partition the starlight and the first rays of dawn are all too plainly visible, while the cold wind of the Canadian winter whistles in upon the shivering sleepers.

Certainly those gentlemen's sons who are ambitious to learn farming would do well to make very thorough investigations concerning the advertisements which appear from time to time, and to first discover whether the advantages are such as they are represented to be.