



Vol. XVI.—No. 821.]

SEPTEMBER 21, 1895.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]

GIRLS WHO WORK IN THE FIELDS: THE HOP-PICKERS.

PART I.

IN the days towards the end of August, when the fierce sun pours down his rays upon the pavements of almost deserted London, and everyone who has the chance to get out of town, has taken advantage of it; when the over-heated factories, with all their noisy machinery, are wearing out the vitality of those employed, let us pay a visit to one of the hopping centres which enable many thousands of our poorest London workers to get a holiday, and a remunerative one.

Having found out when the cheap excursion trains are run for the hoppers and booked our way by one, we find ourselves among a crowd of people on the platform, all bent on the same mission. They are a worn-out looking lot, the unhealthy city life has left its mark upon them, but they all seem to be happy, for they know, that for the next fortnight or so, they will be leading a sort of camping-out existence in the lovely country air; and not only will it cost them nothing, but, in all probability, they will come back with more money in their pockets than they have had for many a long day. Their "luggage," which is lying about on the platform, consists of huge bundles tied up in quilts, and a motley lot of old stools and chairs that certainly look as though they were on their last legs. The weather is their main topic of conversation, all know how much their enjoyment depends upon it and what a difference it will make in their earnings. The train arrives, and, having found places for themselves and stowed away their luggage, steams away with its living freight from the weary, toiling city life to the peaceful beauty of the Kentish hop-fields.

We alight, with many others, at a quaint old village, and pass from the station to the main street. How quiet it is after the noisy train, it seems indeed to be at rest; but with all its quiet it has no look of desertion, the cottages



"A COOL SHADY LITTLE PASSAGE."

All rights reserved.]

are so neat and the gardens so bright. The afternoon sun, with its cool shadows cast along the road, and the breeze whispering among the trees, help to make such a peaceful picture, that we cannot help thinking what a joy this must be to those whose lives during the rest of the year are spent among the slums of our great city. The village is built on the slope of a hill, crowned at the top with a group of trees which shelter the quaint little church, the red tiles of its roof peeping out, here and there between the leaves. Climbing the hill and entering the churchyard, from its elevated position one gets a lovely view of undulating green slopes, of valleys, of hills rising over hills all bathed in sunshine. A huge billowy sea of hop-gardens stretches out before us, beginning almost within our touch, and extending to the most distant hill, as far as the eye can travel. Just below, the hops festooned from pole to pole, form cool, shadowy, little passages, coaxingly mysterious; further on they mass themselves into a carpet of green, covering the slopes and disappearing over one hill, only to appear again and cover the next, until the blue mists of distance hide them from our view. How beautiful it is in the warm glow of the sun, how quiet, how peaceful; and all watched over by the quaint little church, near to which we are standing. Its little bell rings out and vibrates up among the hills and down the valleys, which echo back the sound as if to thank it for its peace-

ful guardianship. How very old it is; its grey tower being overtopped by the red roof of the choir, giving it a look of being bent down with its weight of years. All nature seems to be in sympathy with it; where a wall has bulged out a huge yew tree spreads out its arms to support it; the ivy winds its branches round on all sides to protect it; the merry little apple tree, rustling in the breeze, rubs its rosy-cheeked fruit against it as if to cheer it in its old age. All nature seems to say to it, you are guardian over us and we shall take care that nothing injures you. As we are going to spend our days in the hop-gardens, surrounding the little church, it will be our guardian too, and its merry little bell will cheer us through our days of toil and pleasure spent in the hop-picking season.

Passing through the churchyard, we enter one of the mysterious little avenues of hop vines; how cool and pleasant it is. The poles are placed a few feet apart, the hops clinging to them and festooned from one to the other, forming a leafy tunnel, the sun gleaming through the leaves, throwing small patches of light, which dance about as the wind comes rippling down, rustling the leaves, and tossing about the little clusters of hops that hang like tassels from the vines. All is so peaceful and quiet and so very, very remote from the world of work and noise, that we cannot help regretting that it is so soon to pass away; to-morrow it will be all bustle and confusion, as it is the first day of hop-picking.

As the day draws to its close, we make our way back to the little cottage, which is to be our residence for a time. How prettily situated it is, all in a bowery garden, it seems so to suit the surroundings that one almost thinks it must have grown up there like the flowers. Just over the trees, at the end of the garden, rise three big oast-houses, with their wooden hoods, freshly painted white for the season. What strange things these oast-houses are. All the year round they are unused, except for the brief hopping-season. Although they do not do much work, they seem to think a lot, and as their wise old heads sway to and fro on their rusty pivots, and go creaking round on windy nights, they seem to be exchanging confidences with one another. Just now they are quite still, all pointing in the same direction, and, like all the other villagers, are at rest. As we are to be up early to-morrow, to be in time for the commencement of the hop-picking, it is well that we retire also.

At about six o'clock in the morning we find ourselves in the hop-garden, with a group of people all waiting to be "placed." What a chance for studying character! There are all kinds of women and children here; some are from the village, some from the towns; some we recognise as our fellow-passengers from London, but they all seem to know the place, for they have been here before to pick the hops, some for many years, and there are a few whose forefathers, for many generations, have picked in the same garden. Now many are shaking hands and exchanging confidences with friends whose acquaintance was made at former hop-pickings, but whose paths in life, during the rest of the year, fall in widely different directions. Order is soon established on the arrival of the farmer with the "bind-men" and "tally-men," who arrange matters and give the pickers their numbers, by which they will be known as long as they work on the same farm. All being settled, and each party taking a place according to their number, having provided themselves with seats, they wait until the binds are brought to them by the bind-men, who cut and tear the hop-binds from the poles, and place them in heaps near to the pickers. All further arrangements are now left to the tally-men, one of whom is to look after our little company. We are especially lucky, as our tally-man is a handsome, cheerful-looking young man, standing about six-foot-two, his string of tallies strung across his shoulder, as soldiers carry their cartridges. He is dressed in a serge suit, with tight-fitting gaiters and a broad-brimmed hat; he has a look of strength about him, reminding one of the drawings one sees of the pioneers of British civilisation. He is the village school-master, and, every year, like the rest of the village people, he makes his holiday a remunerative one by working in the hop-gardens.

The tallies are a number of bits of wood, about nine inches long, all strung together and numbered. Each hop-picker or group of hop-pickers has a similar piece of wood given to them, also numbered. All the reckoning is done by cutting notches in these pieces of wood; when the pickers have picked a basket (five bushels), the tally-man cuts a notch in their piece of wood, at the same time notching the piece of wood with the corresponding number, which hangs with the rest slung across his shoulder. This method of reckoning probably dates before the field-labourers had the power of reading and writing, and, until recently, the exchequer accounts were kept in tallies.

So, out in this lovely country, during the beautiful weather we usually have at the commencement of September, and with such interesting company, we hope to enjoy a few days among the hop-pickers.

(To be concluded.)



OFF HOPPING.

H.C.B



GIRLS WHO WORK IN THE FIELDS: THE HOP-PICKERS.

PART II.

WE hop-pickers are a very merry party, and all working hard; since the commencement we have dropped identity by name and are alone known by numbers. In some places are three or four picking to fill the same basket. Number twelve is a very interesting group, as there are evidently three generations at work; there is the grandmother, with a big coal-scuttle bonnet, the mother, and the little grandchildren, one so small, that she has to stand up to put her hops in the basket. Two hospital nurses have just turned up to help number fourteen, a very pale, emaciated woman, probably they have been nursing her at the local hospital, and have come to take care that she should not overtask her energy. Number fifteen is taken up by a little boy and girl, brother and sister; the girl is having rather a hard time of it, her brother having already eaten his own lunch, three or four hours before the proper time, is every now and then trying to appropriate his sister's. Number sixteen is a pretty little girl with a big sun bonnet and a lot of chestnut hair waving about in the wind; she is dressed in a pink and white dress, and makes quite a sweet picture backed up by the green leaves of the hops, at least so thought the writer, who being among the hop-pickers for the purpose of sketching, with the permission of number sixteen, at once commenced to do his share of the day's work.

Although there is no slackness, all seem to be enjoying themselves, and the rippling laughter is only interrupted by the occasional call for the tally man to make a notch in the tally, another basket having been filled; or to the bind men to bring more hop binds to be picked. On one occasion the laughter broke out into quite a ringing peal; it was on the appearance of "Old Bogey," an old man who came round every season with a basket of rolls, fruit, sweets, etc. He certainly was a remarkable



"A VERY MERRY PARTY."

individual who merited his nick-name. The weather was beautiful and the sun glowed on the trees and earth with all the glorious warmth of a summer day, yet "Old Bogey" appeared in a thick ulster, his nose only just peeping above a heavy comforter, and under his arm was a large basket of penny rolls. Despite his remarkable appearance he soon disposed of his rolls, and, having come across many of his former acquaintances, entered into animated conversation with them, and being asked to join the mid-day meal, as it was nearly twelve o'clock, busied himself with preparing the fires.

At twelve all work is stopped, and soon the blue smoke and crackling wood and the smell of savoury food, make it apparent that all have come well provided; each little group sitting round partakes of a well-merited meal. Then the older pickers indulge in a short siesta, and the younger stroll about to pick flowers, or visit the neighbouring ponds to see what sort of life they contain, one or two of the more industrious steal back to their baskets, although it is against rules, and try to add a little more to their day's earnings, for in many cases they are in dire necessity. Work is soon again resumed and the afternoon follows much the same course as the morning, the happy laughter intermingling with the rustling of the trees. How unlike the factory life that many of these people are accustomed to. Here the occupation gives a zest to enjoyment; work is a pleasure. The pure, fresh air gives life again to those, who working the other part of the year in factories, or unhealthy rooms, would almost wear themselves out if it were not for this annual holiday.



A LITTLE FAVOURITE.



FILLING THE WAGGONS.

"Old Bogey" has been back to the town to replenish his basket with fruit, sweets, etc., which the mothers buy, as a stimulant, to keep up the energy of their children; the fascination of country ponds and fields being almost too great an attraction. "Old Bogey" now is not our only visitor. The two daughters of the vicar, from the quaint old church on the hill, whose little bell has been minding us of the passing hours, have come to make tea for the pickers, and welcome and refreshing it is, on a sunny afternoon, especially when served by such pretty country girls. The old women get quite prophetic over their tea, and foretell all the greatest happinesses in life that will befall these girls, for their charming compliment of making tea for the poor old hop women.

The day has been a busy one, and many are the notches cut in the tallies. Some of the pickers have picked as much as three or four baskets. (The picking mostly having been done in bushel-baskets, and it requires five bushel-baskets to make one hop-basket, so the most industrious have picked from twenty to twenty-five bushels in the day.) The pay for a basket varies according to the yield of hops, but the pickers are allowed to borrow up to a certain amount on what they have picked.

Day follows day, and the fields of green hops are slowly giving way to the denuded sticks that, when seen from the little church, look like patches of purple mist on the landscape. The quaint old oast-houses are beginning to awaken from their yearly slumber, and puffs of thin blue smoke are streaming from their white hoods. All the hops that have been picked are now in these houses, and are being dried and sulphured, to kill the insects that may be amongst them. The same pickers are still at work, although the sun has so tanned their faces that it is almost impossible to

recognise them. Many are regretting the passing days, as the short holiday of little more than a fortnight is rapidly drawing to a close.

The fields now being picked are some distance from the little church, and its bell is only very faintly heard, reminding us that hour follows hour, never again to be regained, as the inscription on the old sundial says—

“Hours are flying
Life is passing,
Seconds measure man’s domain.”

Now, as the evening approaches, the farmer sends his waggons to fetch us home, and a pretty picture they make, festooned with hop-leaves, as they labour along the country lanes, and leave the people at their various lodgings. Some are stopping with friends, others with relations, others have been put up by the farmer in out-houses or small huts erected for them, where they retire to that well-earned

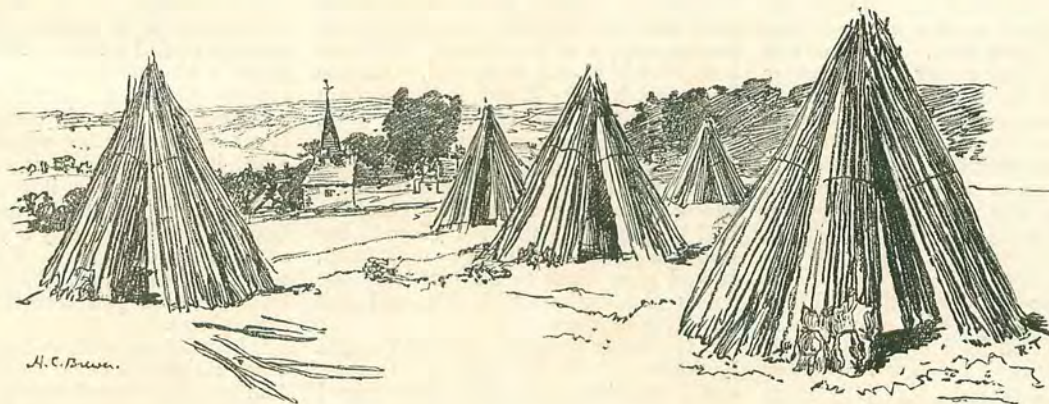
rest, which is so unsparingly allotted to those who work in the open air.

A few words about the hop itself may interest our readers. It was introduced into England from Flanders, in the early part of the sixteenth century, and is cultivated in the counties of Kent, Sussex, Hereford, Worcestershire, Wiltshire, Hampshire, Gloucestershire, and Surrey. Young hops are planted in groups of three, and do not bear fruit until the second year, when, in a good season, they will produce an average of from four to five hundredweights an acre. In the third year the hop arrives at perfection, and the yield will be from eight to fifteen hundredweights an acre. The hops when picked are dried on hair-cloths in the kiln, they are then placed in heaps on the floor, where they undergo a slight heating, a little over 100° Fahrenheit. Abroad they are dried in the sun, but the weather in England is too uncertain, and any damp would injure them. When the

drying is over they are pressed into large bags (called pockets) through a hole in the floor, and stored until the hops are wanted for sale.

September has passed, and all the hop-gardens are laid bare, the sunny days and quivering green foliage are no longer with us, and the trees are donning their rich autumnal garb. In the fields, once so bright and gay with the flickering sunlight, men have been busy all day in piling up the poles together in cone-shaped groups, and now, as they are leaving, the cloud-racked, autumnal sunset proclaims a stormy night, when the fires will go roaring up the old-fashioned chimneys, and the families will group round them to gossip about the beautiful summer, the harvest, and the prospect of a severe winter. And the hoary heads of the old kilns outside will go twisting and creaking round, and the rain will come pouring down to prepare the ground for another prosperous year.

H. C. B.



A WILFUL WARD.

By RUTH LAMB, Author of "Work, Wait, Win," "Sackcloth and Ashes," etc.

CHAPTER XXIII.

IT had been easy for Aylmer to find out that Mr. Torrance had left the train at Earlsford Junction and Kenneth with him. The ex-Captain was too well known through the county for any mistake in identity to be possible. Besides, the carrying off of the child had been a sudden inspiration, not the result of a carefully laid plan, and Mr. Torrance had only counted that it would be needful to detain him for a night in some place unknown to his mother, to ensure her complete subjugation.

At Earlsford, he had hired a conveyance and driven away with the child, then returned alone, and taken train to another station thirty miles distant, whence he would return to Hollingsby.

Aylmer discovered the driver employed by Mr. Torrance without any trouble, and the man was willing to give any information, as Mr. Matheson was no stranger to him.

"It was a new thing for the Captain to be in charge of the little man," he said. "But he was in rare spirits, as if he were up to some trick. Little master cried when his father left him, but Mrs. Munslow will take good care of him. She was nurse at Monk's How once,

and afterwards, she married a widower with two children, but comfortably off. She has one of her own now, so little master won't be short of a playfellow," said the man.

Aylmer knew that Ralph's nurse, Sarah Swain, was married, but neither remembered her present name nor her exact address—only that her home was a couple of miles from Earlsford Junction. The idea that Mr. Torrance would take the boy to Sarah had flashed across his mind, and sent him in the right direction instead of to town. He accordingly engaged the driver to convey him to her house. Under Sarah's charge he found little Kenneth, making himself very much at home in the society of the smallest Munslow.

Sarah beamed with delight at the sight of Mr. Matheson, and frankly owned that she thought her old master was up to some trick to plague his lady.

"I wouldn't have let him leave the child, sir," she said, "only I know Captain Torrance, and I thought he might be left in worse hands if I refused. I knew I could make him comfortable, bless him! Isn't he like his beautiful mother? He has her eyes to a bit."

Mr. Matheson assented and replied, "I am very glad you did take the poor child in. I can trust you to help me in restoring him to his mother."

He did not hesitate to trust Sarah in more than this, for he knew how grateful the woman had been to Kathleen, the Ellicotts and himself, on Ralph's account.

"I always knew what would come of that marriage, sir," said Mrs. Munslow. "My old master might put on new ways for a bit, to get his own way; but he'll never change and be a real, new man. If anybody could have altered him, Master Ralph's mother would have been the one, for Mr. Torrance cared more for her than for any human being but himself.

"Poor Miss Kathleen. She was good to my nursling, and to me. My master couldn't help being taken up with her beautiful face and pretty ways, but what he wanted was the money. He hasn't had sense to keep it, more's the pity. Eh dear! Miss Kathleen thought she could turn him round her little finger he was so meek for a while and when he was in her sight, but out of it—"

Sarah shook her head to express what she did not put into words. In a re-