GIRLS WHO WORK IN THE FIELDS.

GIRLS who live in large towns must realise with difficulty the lives of their poorer sisters, who depend upon the hard work of field labour as the only means of subsistence. Indeed, unless they have travelled on the Continent they are generally unaware of the existence of these patient girls, who, working from six in the morning until six in the evening, do a day's work which would overtax the strength of many a town-bred man.

These girls mostly work on the vegetable gardens, and the greater quantity of vegetables which come to Covent Garden, Stratford, and Southwark markets have been tended by their hands.

Many of these vegetable gardens are on the rich marshy lands of Essex, so let us pay a visit to one of these farms.

It is a lovely day in August, and the fields are all bathed in the warm glow of a midsummer's sun. The first field we pass is a corn-field; all is business and life, the harvest is being reaped, and, as the cutting-machine moves forward, there is a girl following and tying the corn in sheaves. This is the first example of a female labourer we come across, so it may interest "Our Girls" to know how she is dressed. She has on a rough straw hat tied round with a bit of ribbon, and probably if young and pretty (as the girl we are describing) she has added a few wild flowers. Her dress is dark in colour, and made of some thick material. City girls will probably think that in the country for the month of August some lighter material would be more suitable. So it would for a walk or a drive, but the labour of field-work would make it look dirty in a few minutes; and should it come on to rain, as in a climate like ours it very frequently does, the thinner material would be but very little protection. So her dress is dark and of a thick material, tied in at the waist by the strings of the coarse sackcloth apron which is almost always worn while working. Her sleeves are turned up, her waist is broad, her figure sturdy and strong, and the sun glows on her ruddy healthful face, for although the work is hard, perhaps too hard for a girl, and the food is poor and often scanty, yet the open air and the early retiring and rising seem to make up for these disadvantages.

It will be probably said, what has a corn-field to do with a vegetable farm? Well, the vegetable crop has to be continually changed, and frequently a crop of corn, eye and tares, or oats, has to be reaped in its place, otherwise the vermin increase on the vegetable garden and the crop is blighted and destroyed before it is fit for food. Consequently, most vegetable farms have one-third of corn sown on them.

Let us leave the corn-field, which is rapidly changing from the swaying mass not unlike a sea of gold rippling in the breezes, into those quaint stacks standing on the stubble, which will in their time give place to the plough, and the rich earth be turned up again, to receive the autumn crop of vegetables. Passing on to the next field, which happens to be a bean-field, one is struck with the picturesqueness of the long straight rows of beans all covered with bloom. It is the first day of bean-picking, and all is bright with life and gaiety on this beautiful day. The work of picking is done by girls and women, and as they go up one row and come down another, talking to each other when they meet, it makes a very animated scene. They all seem to be happy. The beans are plentiful. The day is lovely, and being early in the season the beans fetch a good price in the London market. The women, who here are on "piece-work," are paid by the quantity they pick, so they are labouring as diligently as they can. Here and there are girls who seem to be not quite up to the work, for they probably have come from the village or town to make a little pocket-money, and are not used or dependent upon it; but as they are paid by the quantity they pick, anyone who chooses can come. Now we shall be able to study them a little more closely as
the cart comes rumbling up the road to take back the beans which have been picked. As it draws up close to us, each girl shoulders her sack, and turns to the further end of the field to bring it up to the foreman, and as we see them we realise how hard their work is, these sacks holding about 150 lbs. The girls are in the same way as the one before described, but how different they are from one another, some only just having left school. Others in the full strength of womanhood, with the glow of health on their faces. Others thin and prematurely old, looking as though this work was strangely out of place (afterwards we found out that these delicate girls had been factory girls, but owing to the falling of a factory in the neighbourhood they had to turn to field work as a means of subsistence), and lastly came a very old woman from the end of the field carrying her sack, quite full, which seemed, like her weight of years and cares, almost too much for her to bear. When at last she came and deposited her sack, for which they had all been waiting, they gave her quite a hearty welcome, and standing sufficiently upright for us to see her face, she seemed quite smiling and cheerful, for although she was full of years, she had borne them as well as the sack she carried, and would until her time was up and death would relieve her from her hard and laborious life. Then some of the girls who had only picked half a sack shared with one another and put their beans together to make up the full sack. As the beans were selling so well in London, the farmer was able to pay as much as one shilling a sack for the picking, which was probably the reason for their cheerfulness. The more experienced will pick as much as three or four sacks in the course of the day, yielding a sum of money which will not only keep them for the time, but be enough to put by for those hard times that come in the autumn and winter, when work is so difficult to get and pay is so very small. "Indeed," remarked one of the girls, "it is nearly as good as the pea-picking time, because although we make more then, we begin at 4.30 in the morning and go on nearly till midnight." So all being satisfied, with their baskets under their arms they went up the rows again, singing and talking, the dull grey of their sackcloth again contrasting with their cheerful faces, and the bright colour of their cheeks almost rivalled the blossoms on the plants. How different was the scene when passing the same field one day at the end of September! It was scarcely six in the evening, yet almost dark; the rain had been falling all day, driven by a keen north wind, penetrating to one's very bones. The plants that looked so bright before, now hung down almost denuded of leaves; here and there a blossom which had tried to struggle into existence only made the field look gloomier. Some of the girls whom we had seen before were still working in the field drenched to the skin and shivering with cold.
OLD SARAH.

warm evening light appearing between them. It was only fancy though, for the sky was as dull as ever. The cart, looking like a black mountain, was rumbling away and seemed quite unearthly until it was lost in the distant mist.

As our way lay in "Old Sarah's" direction, we asked her if we might accompany her and carry her basket for her, as she seemed so very tired. Indeed, her day's work was almost too much for her. On our way she told us how hard the times were and how difficult it was to make 1s. 6d. go round, she not only having her-
PART II.

Since that day in August we have paid many visits to the same farm, and now several of the workers have become familiar to us. When passing one is greeted with many a smile and nod of recognition. The corn which before shone golden in the sunlight is all gone. The ploughmen are at work, and the carpet of yellow stubble narrows day by day as the rich purple earth is turned over. The earth is however not long left idle, line after line of little green plants are beginning to cover it. On each acre of ground a planter is at work. Having placed a line of cord from one end of the field to the other, with the spud in his hand, and guided by the cord, he bends down and spuds the hole, and plants the small plant which has just been dropped for him. About four yards in advance is the girl who is dropping the plants; her apron is full of them, and at intervals along the field are baskets of them, with which to replenish her apron when she has disposed of those she has been carrying. She drops them about a foot apart, and occasionally looks back to see if they have fallen in the right position.

She is Ruth, the daughter of the blacksmith, and we always know her at a glance, for of all the girls who work on the farm she is the neatest and tidiest; she is also the best read girl. While her parents were living it was not necessary for her to work so hard as she now does, and owing to the lending library attached to the church, in her spare time she has read one or two of Dickens' and Scott's novels. Her conversation, however, nearly always gets upon her dead father, and with what pride she recounts his deeds of strength, how he could break bars of iron with his hammer, and the weights he could lift! When at the school sports, after the boys had been throwing the hammer, he would take it up and throw it farther than any man that ever lived. How in the winter he would be knocked up at all hours of the night to put rough nails in the shoes of horses passing. This work was

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very frequently required, as most of the carts laden with vegetables for London passed that way, so as to be in time for the early morning market.

On her pressing us one day, we went to her little cottage to see her father's hammer, which she had carefully preserved, and valued beyond all her earthly possessions. What a pretty little cottage it was—how neat and tidy. The tables and chairs were only of unstained deal, the boards were unpainted, but how spotlessly clean. Over the mantelshelf hung the cherished hammer, a lump of iron with a wooden handle, not very much certainly to look at, but such a golden treasure in her eyes! She had one or two books also, amongst others Ivanhoe. She thought Ivanhoe was not unlike her father when he was a young man, although to be sure Ivanhoe had been to Palestine, and her father had never left the village, but the way in which Ivanhoe beat them all in the tournament was like her father. When we suggested that Ivanhoe was beaten by the knight in black armour, she said she thought her father would have beaten him too, for with his hammer in his hand no man could stand against him.

On the table was a well-thumbed copy of The Girl's Own Paper. She always read it, she told us, but sometimes it had to be passed to another before it was quite finished, as there were generally many girls waiting for it, and she had so little spare time to read now, but she managed to copy out many of the recipes for cooking and cleaning, etc., and probably much of her neatness was owing to the excellent advice laid down by this paper.

The girl in the next field is also plant-dropping, and we know her too; they call her "Sally." She is the hardest worked girl on the farm, and one of the industriest. She is not so used to the work as the other girls, so the planter who has employed her makes her work longer hours for less money. Ruth, who is working for her brother-in-law, begins at six and finishes at six, and receives eighteen pence a day, but Sally begins at half-past five and will have to work until half-past six for sixteen pence. She is indeed very untidy; her hat is on one side, her long black hair has partly come undone, and a lock or two hangs down in front of her face; she has missed her apron, and in its place she has a sack tied round her waist. Her boots are all on one side, and full of holes, being but a very poor protection against the damp cold earth. But, gentle reader, you must not condemn her. The morning was misty and cold, yet at half-past two, when it was scarcely light, she had to be at her work, after having prepared her own breakfast. All through the long, cold, misty day she has been working, and she will not finish until half-past six, and all her sixteen pence! When her work is over she will probably trudge off to a bit of ground the farmer has lent her, and for another hour tend her own little plot of vegetables, and dig up sufficient potatoes to last her for a day or two, or to put by for the winter. She is very unfortunate and always has the hardest work. When all the beans were picked, her work was to pull up the plants, so that next year they should not come up as weeds. There were acres of these plants; their roots get a firm grip of the earth, and their stems become hard and horny. Hour after hour she had to stoop down and tear the plants from the ground. We tried our hand at the work, and after cleaning a few yards our hands were sore, our backs felt ready to break, and we felt that for all the world we could not pull up another plant. Yet this girl had twelve hours of the work, and in rain, mist, or sunshine, she toiled on without grumbling, and indeed, even had a smile for you whenever you met her and exchanged the greetings of the day.

In another part of the farm the spinach is being picked, and here again we see familiar faces; those tall strong girls picking the leaves side by side are "Lisa" (Elizabeth) and Mary, but unlike their namesakes in history, they are fast friends. Nothing seems to separate them. They live together in the same cottage, divide their earnings and work for one another. The farmer, who is a good-hearted man, generally tries to get them work on the same field. Lisa is fair and good-looking, and has many admirers, so report says, but she will have "none of them," as marriage would mean separation from her friend. But a time will probably come when well-bred will seem more pleasant in her eyes, and the old friends will have to be parted. Let us hope, however, when that time does arrive, Mary will also be looking forward to marriage. Mary is dark and very sunburnt, almost swarthy, but she is always laughing and looks so very good-natured, that we would not wonder if she was the first to be mated.

The year is growing older now, and the days draw in. It is six o'clock, and darkness is coming on. The engine, which has been threshing the corn, has just finished up with a puff and snort. The old mill has ceased to go round, and men and women are making their way home, some singly, others in groups, to the various little cottages which stand the landscape. What a hard day's work it has been and with what keen pleasure they must look forward to the few hours' rest they are about to enjoy.

The work done by girl-labour on the fields is generally of the lighter kind, such as tying and picking the vegetables, lifting the rye and tares, and the cabbages; picking the beans and peas, and the fruit, and in hop countries, the hops. All this work is paid by the piece, so the more skillful the worker the higher the pay, and girls brought up to it are able to earn from 1.4d. to 4s. 6d. a day. It is owing to this work they can put sufficient to keep them through those times when work is very scarce, or not to be had. Girls also work at weeding, plant-dropping, planting, sowing, potting gathering, which is paid as day labour, and at it they earn from 1s. 2d. to 1s. 6d. a day. Some of this work is done by the wives and daughters of the poorer country people, who can get time between their household duties, and by this means assist in making sufficient for the year's necessities, but the greater quantity of this work, especially the picking of hops, is done by such girls as we have been describing, who, through their whole lives, are working in the fields, and the wages they receive at this work is the only means of support.

In one of our rambles about the farm, we met Ruth opening the gate to her cottage, and her father was beside her, a tall girl of about four years old. Ruth had not been planting the last day or two; her brother-in-law had been employing her (the planters are paid by the acre, and out of their
money they pay those who assist them) was in difficulties. He and a few of the farm men had been out rabbit-hunting. They had looked upon it as an "evening's lark," but how differently it turned out. They were caught and sentenced to some months imprisonment. How selfish had been their action in risking their liberty. In prison, they would not suffer one tithe of the misery that would be caused their wives and children, who through the long cold winter would lose their principal bread-winner. Indeed, in the case of Ruth's sister, it would mean starvation or the workhouse, as she was too unwell to work, and had four children, all too young to earn. But think you her fellow-workers would let her starve? No, hard as it is to live, and difficult as it is to make sufficient to keep "body and soul" together, there is not one who will not lend a helping hand to her friend in distress.

Indeed, they were all now tending as much from their savings as they possibly could spare to give to her, so that the home should not be broken up, and Ruth was bearing her share of the burden by bringing the eldest girl to live with her. As the gate closed upon them, we could not help thinking what a lesson these poor hard-working people might frequently teach their better-off neighbors in the towns; for, though these peasants are so very poor themselves, they always manage to assist their still poorer companions.

There are better things in store, though, for Ruth; she will not be always dependent upon her own work for a livelihood. In her mind there dwells another Ivanhoe; not like her father, who wielded his hammer with so much strength, but one who has travelled hundreds of miles away. "Old Sarah," has told us all about it. Before her father died Ruth was engaged; but her lover, seeing no chance of making sufficient to offer her a home in this country, had gone over to America, and there had been working hard to make a living, lately with so much success that in the following spring he will come over and marry her in the little village church, and then they will leave for their new home and perhaps never again see the country of their birth.

Ruth's familiar face will at first be missed by her friends; but in this hard life memories soon fade, and when her place is filled by another she will be to them like last year's flowers, blotted out of remembrance by the new ones that have come up in their place.

All the workers are not like Ruth; many were born and will live all through their lives near the farm. There is "Old Sarah," for instance. She was born in the little black tarred cottage she now lives in, and has never been farther than a walk from it; she has never been inside a train; the only changes which she understands are those which are connected with the farm. She has grown up on the farm, and is as much a part of it as the old barn with its red roof, or the hedges which divide the fields. The farm has changed hands several times, but the new
farmers always take her on; and she tells you with pride how her advice is asked about the crops with such success, etc., and how she became to use, which is the best time for seeding and ploughing; and she points to one crop flourishing better than the rest, and tells you the farmer took her advice about that crop. Then, pointing to another crop all blighted, she tells you that the farmer would try to rear vegetables on the field, although she advised a crop of grain. Then, if you go to go with her, she will show you her pantry, all lined with large red earthenware pans, making ginger-beer, barb's wine, etc., and tell you how she always was noted for her skill in making these beverages. In times gone by, when the villagers were ill, they used to come to her for a little wine, which was, in her opinion, much more efficacious than the nasty medicine supplied by the chemist. Now, however, they are all empty. Hard times and old age are upon her, and when her day's work is done, she has no strength or energy left for making these beverages. One cannot but smile at her little conceits, but what are they when compared with her truly noble action in supporting her invalid husband and child when she herself is so very old.

How pretty the little cottages are on a bright morning with their gardens all glowing in the sun. Even these gardens under its own care, for indeed nowhere else do flowers grow so luxuriantly. Here are roses which seem to be always blooming, rows of hollyhocks, pelargoniums, poppies, camomiles and hundreds of other flowers all growing together like a heap of colors. If you are early enough in the morning, a little before six, when the sun sparkles in the windows, and throws long shadows across the paths, and the air is cool, if she has been out to gather flowers and fresh as the new-born day, you will see the brightest flower of all, the toiler in the fields, kissed by the morning sun, and gilded by its rays, as she daily rounds of work. Her work is hard and rough, and requires but very little mental exertion; but when her day's work is over of she has done her best, what more could be required of her. Are we not judged according to the light that is given to us, and will not her day's work be as acceptable to God as that of the most highly gifted?

LIFTED UP.
By the Author of "The Knock at the Door."

"Oh, I made sure you were looking at it!" cried Leslie, jumping down and running to his brother's side. "Look, Herbert, look! There it is! See, I've got the surprise for you! Oh, I am so glad!"

Herbert's eyes fell languidly on the picture again. "Did you buy it for me, dear?" he asked. "It's very nice, indeed."

"But you're not looking properly at it!" cried Leslie excitedly. "I'll cure you, you know; that's the surprise! Look at it again, please Herbert. Now, don't you feel any better?"

Boy though he was, a dim idea of what his little brother had hoped and expected crossed Herbert's mind, and he threw his arms round him and drew him closer. "Never mind, old man!" he whispered fondly. "It's a beautiful picture all the same, and it was awfully good of you to buy it for me. I'll get father to hang it up when he comes in."

"Oh, but, Herbert, it'll cure you! Won't it cure you? Oh, do look at it again! I'll bring it nearer you. He said it would cure everybody. Perhaps you haven't seen it well!"

"Never mind, dear; if it doesn't cure me I don't want it to have it," said Leslie. He clung to himself in his shoulder as he saw Leslie's quivering lip and disappointed face. "Come and sit on the bed here, and tell me all about it. It's a beautiful surprise, I'm sure, and I like it very much."

But poor Leslie's disappointment was too great to be borne so calmly, and he burst into a passion of sobs. Was this the end of it all, after all he had hoped and dreamed and planned for? Was it nothing but a story that the preacher in the streets had told him? Was Herbert still to die, and go away alone, and never to get up and be well and strong and play with him again? Where was her little brother? She wished so to console him with her; she was alway kind to him when he was so unhappy. He turned to rush out of the room and up-stairs just as the door was opened, and Dr. Westwood and Leslie entered, and ran straight into the doctor's arms.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed. "Where are you off to, little man? What is the matter? What is all this about, eh?"

"He said he needed only look at it, and he'd be all right," sobbed Leslie, gazing up at him. "And it isn't true. It hasn't cured him at all!"

"What hasn't cured him? What need he only look at it?" asked Dr. Westwood.

"Why, the picture just looks like Moses and the