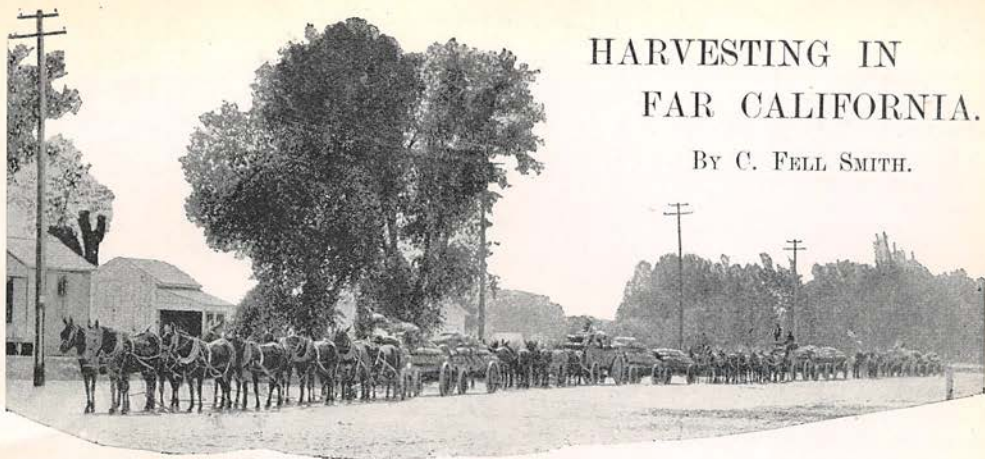


HARVESTING IN FAR CALIFORNIA.

By C. FELL SMITH.



TRAIL WAGONS CARRYING CORN TO THE WAREHOUSES.

IT was Sidney Smith who said of America that if you only tickled her with a hoe she immediately laughed with a harvest. And in America's farthest western state, California, it seems that scarcely even the most delicate application of that gentle implement is needed to bring forth amazing quantities of everything, from acres of calla lilies to thousands of tons of castor-oil beans, or millions of quarters of wheat. An invocation to Aquarius would, perhaps, be a more fitting prescription, for, of late, dry seasons and the cost of irrigation have driven the ranch owner almost to the verge of despair.

We have long grown accustomed to the laments of the British farmer, and although his proverbial grumble is concerned chiefly with the weather, it would be a mistake to conclude that he has no other enemies. Scarcity of hands, wholesale migration from the rural districts, and the growing disposition of the quasi-"educated" young of the labouring classes to "better themselves," and to look down on agriculture as an employment, have made machinery of treble value to the corn-grower here. And as year by year his harvest time comes round again, he is naturally quick to test the latest products of labour-saving ingenuity in order to secure to himself, with the least possible expenditure of time and wages, the proper fruits of the earth.

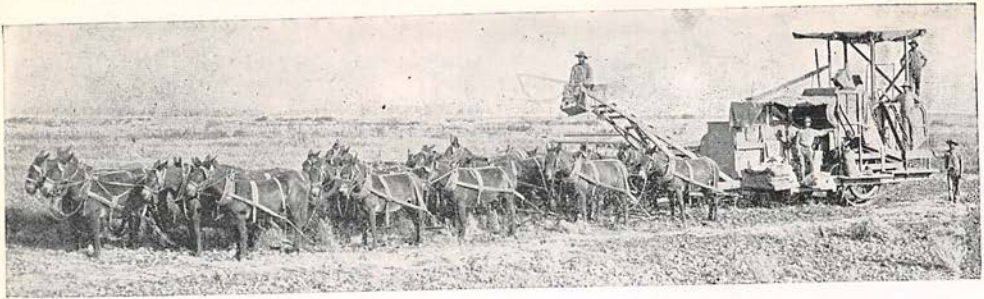
Corn, albeit its value is now something less than one-third of the sum it attained in the year 1855, for instance, or less than one half of its price in 1872, is still the principle yield of twenty-six out of the thirty-two English counties. Long may it be before it

ceases to be so. Is there a more beautiful or distinctive feature of the English landscape than the emerald green expanse of wheat and barley fields in June, when the corn is just bursting into ear—unless it is the same broad acres of tillage in August, when the sheets of golden grain stand awaiting the reaper's knife?

But if labour is scarce here, it is practically non-existent in California. Luckily, as we have seen, Nature is kindly in her virgin mood, and consents to forego many of those attentions with which, under an older cultivation, she has to be wooed into fertility. The Californian field is just a huge piece of plain, about the size of a good-sized farm here. To make the circuit of one will perhaps mean a twenty-mile tramp. Its crop, under the climatic influences of the State, comes rapidly to perfection. Unless it is gathered in with the utmost celerity it would not be worth saving at all. It is no surprise to us, therefore, that the mother of invention has turned out for the needy colonist machinery which simply makes us gasp with breathlessness at the number of operations which can be carried on at one and the same time.

Nothing that can be achieved by mechanical power is ever attempted by a pair of hands, and even the very horses become so clever that they hardly require any driving or looking after.

The photographs illustrating this paper have been just recently sent me by a regular correspondent near Bakersfield. From them a notion of one or two of these operations may be gained. Bakersfield, I may remind the oblivious, is the capital of Kern County,



THE "HARVESTER" REAPS, THRESHES, AND EMPTIES THE CORN INTO SACKS IN ONE OPERATION.

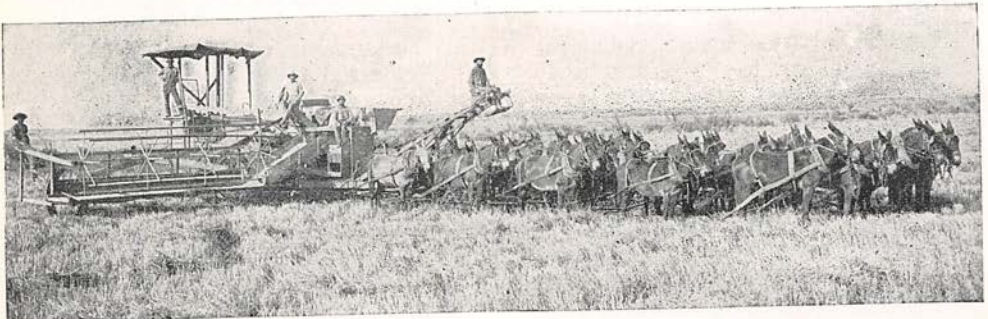
From a photo.

one of the fifty-three counties of California, situated in the south of that immense country. It has an area almost as large as the whole of England, allowing for the difference between our indented coastline and the geometrical outline of the inland county, which upon the map resembles an elongated soap-tablet. The district around Bakersfield has suffered terribly from drought for several seasons. Little rain has fallen, and even the summer's supply of melted snow from the Sierras, which may generally be relied on, has failed. In addition to the fruit-farms, of which I do not propose to speak now, corn and hay are largely grown. The hay is commonly known as "alfalfa," or, as we should call it here, "Lucerne" (*Medicago Sativa*).

The word is Spanish, and is traceable to its Arabic origin, *al-faḥ-ḥaḥah*, meaning "the best sort of fodder"; and an excellent name for it this is, since its peculiarity of a root penetrating to an immense depth beneath the ground renders the plant highly suitable for a dry climate. But alfalfa has other obliging qualities. There is practically no limit to its life. In some parts of the State of Mexico tracts are in existence which were laid down before living memory. Also it may be cut five or six, or even seven, times in

the year, and after each yield it only grows the more rapidly. Unlike the slow, picturesque processes of haymaking in our humid atmosphere, alfalfa requires no drying. It is "made" almost as soon as it is cut, and is stored in large quantities on the spot, being pitched to the top of the stack by a simple arrangement of ropes and pulleys, worked by a couple of horses. Cutting the corn is a more elaborate affair, as will be seen by a glance at the "harvester." This huge machine is drawn by a cavalcade of twenty-six mules. It carries five men, and walks in solemn procession round and round the field of five or six miles square, as the case may be. All the intermediate processes of binding in sheaves, standing in thraves, pitching, loading, and stacking are dispensed with, and the corn is threshed right away on board the harvester.

The ears of wheat are simply torn off as it passes over them, straw being of no value except as fodder for the catt^o, which are turned in to graze upon it. The blade decapitates a swath twenty-five feet wide at once. When the grain has passed through the threshing and winnowing processes it is shot into sacks, which are dropped as the machine travels. Each sack holds from one hundred and thirty to one hundred and



THE "HARVESTER" AT WORK.

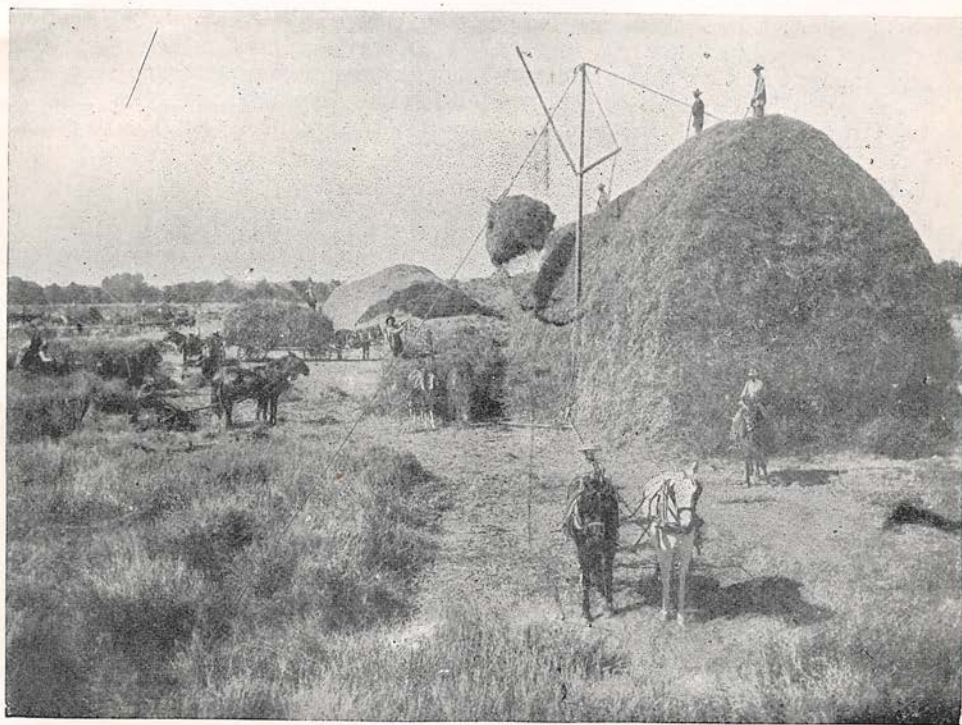
From a photo.

forty pounds of corn, and two men are employed tying them up, as this marvellous monster proceeds on its way. A dump cart is usually hitched on behind to catch the chaff. This is tipped up at regular intervals, leaving the chaff in heaps upon the ground.

Both wheat and barley are harvested by means of this triumphant piece of machinery, these being the principal yield of the arable portions of California, and such tracts of land as are not devoted to the more fascinating, if anxious, industry of fruit growing.

in the lessened original outlay for labour. From the often exorbitant demands of the landlord and tithe-owner, under which land in some parts of the Old Country has become almost untenable, the dweller in the New of course enjoys a complete immunity. But his "gang-plough," drawn by six or eight horses, and upon which he is dependent for the tilling of his land, is a somewhat elaborate and expensive affair.

The way of delivering corn in California is even more typical of the scale on which operations are conducted. The farmer at



MOWING AND STACKING "ALFALFA."

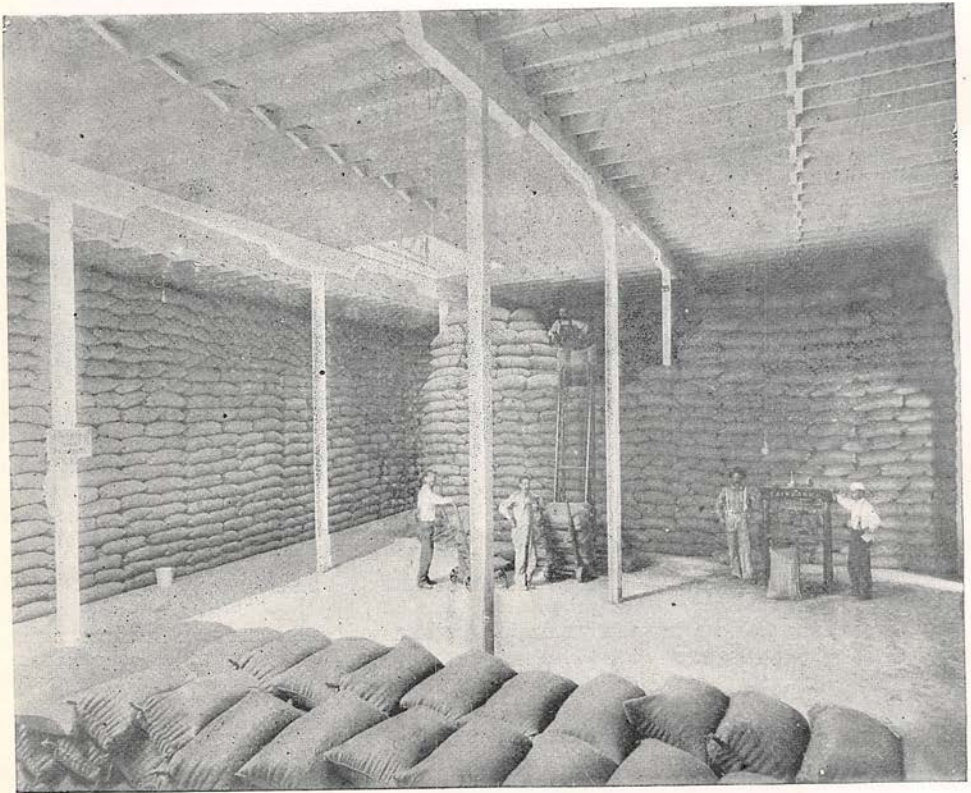
From a photo.

The crop last year was a very light one, amounting only to just over one sack per acre. Generally speaking, the yield is from eight to ten sacks. This, of course, seems but a light crop when compared with the returns obtained by the farmer at home, but as the latter is content, or, to speak more accurately, malcontent, to leave the watering of his fields to Providence and the Meteorological Department, and has only occasionally to substitute an elaborate system of drainage for the still more elaborate and costly scheme of irrigation employed by his Californian brother farmer, there is some compensation

home selects his steadiest and most reliable man to send out in charge of the road wagon and its fine team of four horses, gaily caparisoned with brass ornaments on the harness, and the leather housing edged with scarlet fringes standing up and nodding high above the collar. Like all the various clumsy parts of ancient harness, whether for man or beast, these housings have their use. And where they still survive—for it is but rarely that one meets them now, even in country lanes—the wagoner, or, as he would be described in the vernacular, "the hoss-man," still is careful to turn them down in

wet weather, that they may protect the horses' withers from the dire effects of a soaking. Twenty or thirty years ago, before the spread of railways, the wagoner would start in the small hours of the morning, before daylight dawned, to travel sixteen or twenty miles, and deliver his load of five and twenty quarters of wheat at some distant wind- or water-mill. For the sake of companionship and help he would take with him some odd boy or another off the farm. But here we see three loaded wagons hitched one behind another, twelve or sometimes sixteen horses gaily attached to the front one, and the whole valuable cargo of twenty tons, besides horses, placed in charge of a solitary man, who drives, moreover, with what they call a "single line." To steer successfully a team of sixteen horses by means of one

solitary rope argues certainly superhuman skill on the part of the representative of Jehu, or superequinine intelligence on the part of the animals, be they mules or horses. The hind wheels of the wagons, it will be observed, are very much larger than those in front. On the wagons used for hauling ore from the mines, these hind wheels are of a diameter of seven feet, and of a weight of 900 lb. each. The first wagon is, of course, more heavily loaded than the trail wagons, which convey some three to five tons less in weight respectively. The procession of twelve wagons and thirty-six horses conveys food-stuff enough to provision a whole army with bread. The corn is stored in vast warehouses ready for transport to the coast, and so, across the Atlantic ocean, to help feed London's growing millions with the staff of life.



A CORN WAREHOUSE IN BAKERSFIELD, CALIFORNIA.

From a photo.