



Our English Letter.

One of my disappointments during my stay in the dear old land has been my being prevented by circumstances from visiting, as I had rather hoped to do, the hop-gardens of Kent during the picking season. A dear friend, whose family had for over 200 years occupied a certain most interesting old manor in the very center of the hop industry, having given me a very vivid description of the busy three weeks through which they had lately passed, I begged of her to put together some notes for my column in "The Farmer's Advocate." This she has kindly done, sending me some illustrations, and I gladly pass them on to the readers of our Home Department, in the hope that they may prove of as much interest to them as they have to myself. In this big Canada of ours it may be difficult to realize what to the slum-dweller of overcrowded London this brief period of wage-earning in strong, pure air really means, and how eagerly it is looked forward to by the hop-pickers who seek for employment in the hop-producing fields of Kent and other counties where the industry flourishes. That devoted men and women, clergymen and laymen, undergraduates from Oxford, etc., arrange to spend their holidays in the midst of the workers, with a view to kindly care and gentle guidance, has a wide significance, and has proved of inestimable value in many known instances.

My friend tells of the delight of the hoppers in the entertainments and social evenings provided for them, but from another source I read of what may sound somewhat of an anachronism to Canadian ears, that hop-picking time is turned to good account in the formation of Band of Hope Circles and Temperance Societies. I am told that, some years ago, at the first meeting held at Five Oak Green, only five people turned up; one worker made the remark, "There are the five oaks"; hence its name. The society now numbers some hundreds. Every stalwart who keeps his promise to abstain from intoxicating drinks for a year is presented with a medal at the end of each succeeding year, for five years, a bar is added, when the faithful one is entitled to a gilt medal. Associate members are allowed to join for the time being, if they will faithfully promise to keep "right off the drink" during the hopping.

But it is time to give you my friend's promised notes.

"ON HOPS."

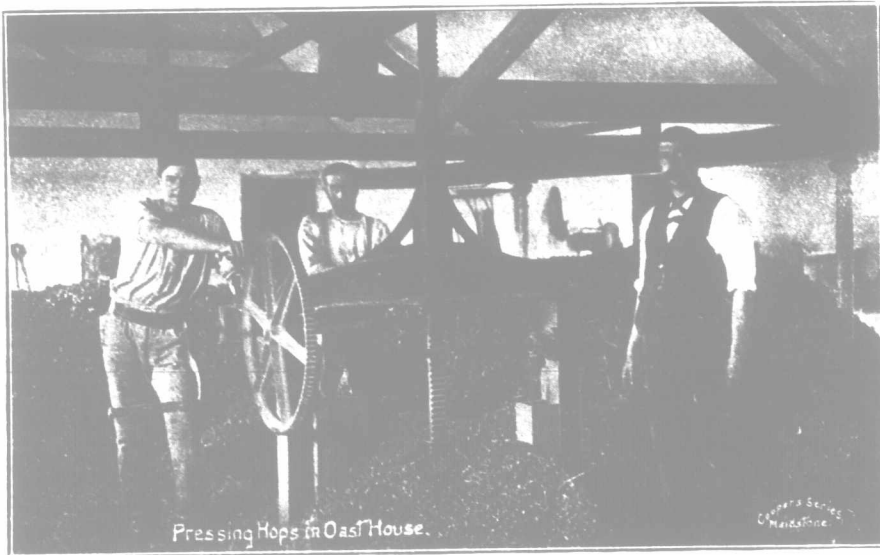
Now to tell you a few incidents of my summer in the hop-growing gardens of Kent. The hop, as you know, is a vine-like plant—used in beer-making—grown on strings tied to wires which are stretched from pole to pole. The plants are rooted in little hillocks about four feet

apart, and in early spring the women (home workers), when the shoots are about a foot high, cut away the extra ones, and twist those that are left around the different strings—generally four strings to a hillock—and tie them. This goes on till they are nearly to the top of the strings, and is called "twidling." During the summer, the hop plants go through many troubles, being preys to insects, cold, blight, wind, mould, etc. For the first, washing is resorted to by means of a machine with many nozzles, and pretty it is, at a distance, to see the clouds of spray blown across and under the plants; for the insects are mostly under the leaves. The best friends of the hops are the Ladybirds, which live on the aphids, one kind of insect which infect the leaves. About July the burr or flower comes, and at the end of August the hops are fully grown and ready for picking. The fields or gardens about here have funny names, such as "Squints," "Honey-field," "Starve Crow"—a very stony one—"Bobbins," and many others, too numerous to recall.

Well, we have reached the time of hop life, which now becomes keenly interesting. Two months ago the "London Pickers" have been accepted; now word is sent to them to come, and the night trains bring them down in hundreds. Indeed, many thousand come into Kent alone, whilst hops are grown in several other counties, too. Of

are only helpers. Then, measurers and bookmen go round. Seven bushels to a shilling, is sometimes the tariff, but it varies, according to goodness or quantities of hops. When measured, the hops are put into pokes or sacks, and carted to the "oast," the place in which they are dried first, laid out on horse-hair cloths, through which hot air is passed by a revolving fan, driven by an engine. After about nine or ten hours, according to experience, as to color, dryness, etc., the hops are thrown off and left to cool—others taking their place for drying—then are pressed into large bags, called "pockets," which weigh, when finished, about one and a half cwt. These are marked and stored, till all are ready to be sent to the London warehouse, to be sold. Before being dispatched, samples are cut out of each pocket, and others put in, by men specially expert in this work. So, you see, many experiences are needed, though the master overlooks all.

Pickers are allowed to draw part of their earnings on sub-nights, generally three times a week. Those evenings are busy ones in the village and at the coffee stalls; also in the church-rooms, which are used during these weeks for the hoppers, who are free to spend the evenings there, in writing letters, playing quiet games, or reading, ladies superintending. Many appreciate the quiet place to come to on wet evenings.



Pressing Hops in Oast House.

course, most of the hoppers are accompanied by their families. On this farm there are 400 pickers, besides "binmen," "measurers" and "bookers." The hopper houses here are built of brick and slates on the heath, and in rows of twenty or less, only used for the three weeks during hop-picking time. They contain only a bedstead, shelf, window (small), and plenty of clean straw. At the end of the season these are thoroughly cleansed, and left empty till next year.

The folks arrive mostly by train, some by roads, and some in caravans and coster-carts. In the station-yard there is a coffee stall, where cakes, bread and jam, tea and coffee, can be had for one half-penny each. The other night, one attendant took in £2 in half-pennies—i.e., in cents. Indeed, there is a big trade for five or six hours, and the seven or eight attendants are all kept busy.

The hoppers then go to their employer, all with cards, and get their quarters allotted to them. Sometimes this is a difficult business, as they want the same houses as they had last time, but the bailiff's word is law. The next morning, picking begins. The pickers are divided into binman companies, a binman to each, who helps to move bins, and is answerable for his company. A bin, I must tell you, is a sack between poles made to stand open, in to which the hops are picked. Generally there are two pickers to each bin; children or others with them

pital is run for emergencies, the only one here only being open for the necessary three weeks, and you can understand what a boon it is.

I only wish you could see the hop gardens, with the pretty light-green hops and dark leaves; but sometimes, sad to say, these get spoilt with insects, wind or rain, and then they turn black, and are not worth the picking, which means a heavy loss to the grower.

Hops are an expensive crop, costing £50 an acre, more or less, according to the farming—the better the farming, the better the crop.

I must not forget to tell you that we have clergy and church-workers working among the pickers; special services and, what they much like, magic-lantern entertainments, and sometimes a concert or baby-show, the prizes being some garments for the children, and maybe tea and buns for the mothers.

Occasionally there is a strike for more money or to pick less; but good masters get good pickers, and then all goes on smoothly. When all is over, we say, "Summer's gone, and autumn comes apace! Let us begin again to collect magazines and books for next year, as the big pile from the cupboard has all gone."

H. A. B.

The Roundabout Club

Topics for the Winter's Work.

The following subjects have been decided upon for the remainder of the winter's Literary Society work. Kindly bear them in mind, and write your essay on each according as you are ready. Do not, however, send any of the essays to us, until you see the announcement regarding the particular subject required.

Study III. Give your opinion on establishing an intellectual standard as a basis for the suffrage.

IV. Write a "character" sketch. This may be in story form, if you choose, but may be simply a descriptive essay.

V. Would it be to the advantage of Canada to have a reciprocity treaty providing for the free exchange of natural products between Canada and the United States?

VI. Write an essay on your favorite poem or novel.

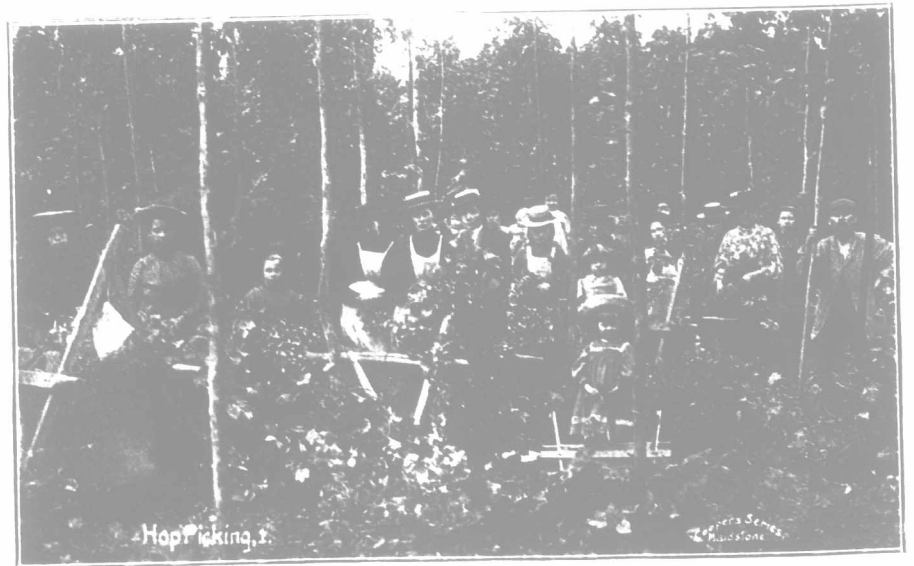
The Beaver Circle.

ALL children in second part and second books, will write for the Junior Beavers' Department. Those in third and fourth books, also those who have left school, or are in High School, between the ages of 11 and 15, inclusive, will write for Senior Beavers'. Kindly state book at school, or age, if you have left school, in each letter sent to the Beaver Circle.

Prize Essay (Boys').

Dear Puck and Beavers,—I saw in the Beaver Circle that the competition for the boys of the Circle was on the subject of "A Corn-roast," so I decided to write.

It had been planned to hold a corn-roast in a neighboring field, and all



Hop Picking.