

Farming for Boys.

BY THE AUTHOR OF TEN ACRES ENOUGH.
CHAPTER XI.

*Mismanaging a Horse.—Value of an Inch of Rain.
—Planting a Tree.—Value of Sharp Hoes.—
A Tree-Pedler.—How Plants grow.*

One of the striking results of the boys' visit to their neighbor's model farm was the change of conversation in the Spangler family. When they came into their meals, they talked continually of what they had seen there, and when out at work there was no end to the references to what had somehow become a sort of standard for their imitation. Uncle Benny was therefore careful to encourage all the good resolutions which his pupils seemed insensibly to be making, as well as to answer the crowd of new questions that were put to him at every turn. The boys could not help making comparisons between the general neatness of the Allen farm and the squalid condition of their own; and they were not slow in endeavouring to copy their neighbors, though their opportunities for doing so were not very great.

Farmer Spangler was of necessity obliged to listen to numerous discussions, in which his neighbor's superior management was so highly extolled and his own so much condemned. Luckily for all, Spangler was a man of few words, and hence a capital listener. He very seldom replied to any attack on his management, as much because of his habitual taciturnity as from a conviction that was insensibly taking possession of him, that there must be some truth in what was said. Generally, Uncle Benny was quite moderate in his depreciation of Spangler's style of farming, as he was unwilling to give offence. But there were occasions, such as when he witnessed some gross departure from good management, or some example that would be really injurious to the boys, and then he would explain himself for Spangler's especial benefit. But even then he spoke to Spangler over the boys' shoulders; that is, though he addressed his words to them, he was really intending them for the father. In this way he could drop hints in much sharper language than if he had spoken to the man himself. Spangler took no offence at these side thrusts, and rarely made any reply.

On one occasion, when the latter was putting a young and skittish horse to the wagon, he threw the harness suddenly and with great violence on its back, instead of gently placing it there. The timid creature, not yet accustomed to being harnessed, shrunk back and became quite unmanageable, and ended by treading on the wagon-shaft, which he broke in two. Seeing this, Spangler became enraged, and gave the horse a violent kick in the side. Uncle Benny and the boys were standing by, and saw it all.

"That will never do," said the old man, addressing the boys, but loud enough for Spangler to hear. "A horse should never be kicked, or even punished. It is gentle treatment alone that makes a horse valuable, and cruel treatment makes him worthless. We abuse our horses more unfeelingly than any other people, and control them through fear instead of love for us. Even the unchristianized Arabs never abuse their horses, nor do the Chinese ever punish theirs. 'As obstinate as a mule' is a common expression; but a mule is not naturally obstinate, but is made so by being educated to bad treatment. The mule, which, in the hands of most people, would be not only useless, but dangerous to all who came near him, would, in the hands of a Chinaman, become quiet as a lamb and tractable as a dog. A vicious, balky, or runaway mule is almost unknown among the Chinese, because of the uniform gentleness with which they treat them. They educate all other domestic animals by the same rule, securing obedience through the agency of love instead of fear. Cattle, pigs, ducks, and birds are equally cared for. These dumb beasts have sensibilities and affections as well as ourselves. Never let me see a horse kicked by any of you. A hired man who should kick my horse, or beat him with a shovel, as is often done, should be turned off immediately."

"That must be the reason why our Nancy and the pigs like me so well," added Bill Spangler when the old man had concluded. "I curried them up, and never scolded them, and they come to me just like a dog."

"Yes," replied Uncle Benny, "the law of kindness operates as strongly on the brute creation as it does on human hearts. The man who is truly

merciful will always be merciful to the dumb, dependent creatures around him."

This accident to the wagon-shaft delayed Spangler a whole hour in starting for town, because, as he had but one wagon, the damage must in some way be repaired. It was so broken that nailing would not answer; so they tied the shaft round with a small horse-blanket, and kept that in its place by ropes and straps, and with this unsightly contrivance Spangler drove off. There was no real necessity for his going, even before the breakdown; but then there was to be an auction sale of household goods and farming utensils, and though he had no occasion to purchase any of them, yet he thought it would be well for him to be there, "just to see how they sold." There are some people in this world who have a passion for attending funerals, and one of Spangler's fancies was for attending sales, no matter how much home business he might neglect by going.

All this happened just after dinner, in the month of June, when there were strong indications of a thunder-gust. But off Spangler went, and, as Uncle Benny had expected, the gust broke upon him while he was on the road, and gave him a complete drenching. Of course it drove all hands into their usual refuge,—the barn; and there they sat while the rain poured down in torrents. It was the first good rain there had been for two weeks, and was much wanted by the farming community. It poured down so heavily, and continued so long, that Uncle Benny observed, "There must be at least an inch of this rain."

"What is an inch of rain?" inquired Joe Spangler, looking through a knot-hole in the side of the barn, over a great pond that had been suddenly filled by the shower. "I should say it was a foot."

"Well, boys," replied the old man, "an inch of rain don't mean the water that is collected in puddles where the ground happens to be full of holes, but that which falls on a level all over the land. Now, when this shower is over, look into the bucket out by the pump—I remember it was empty when the rain began—and whatever depth of water you may find in it will be the extent of the rainfall. This is what we call a rain-gauge; and it is by having so simple a contrivance at all times in use that observing men, that watch the clouds and weather, have been able to prove that about as much rain falls in one year as in another. Thus, if we have long spells of dry weather, they are succeeded by heavy rains, and thus very extraordinary rains are followed by long dry spells, making the rain-fall of many years average about the same."

"But an inch of rain don't sound much, though it looks to be a great deal," exclaimed Tony King.

"Why, Tony," replied Uncle Benny, "an inch of rain weighs more than a hundred tons to the acre, and is equal to nearly twenty-three thousand gallons. A watering-pot must have a big nozzle to discharge that quantity in an hour, as the clouds often do for us. This rain will be worth a great many thousands of dollars to the farmers about here, especially if it should be followed by really fine weather."

"Fine weather," he continued, "is a wonderful thing for the farmer—next among his blessings to the Divine promise that seed-time and harvest should never fail. A single day of sunshine is considered worth ten millions of dollars to the farming interest of England in a season of doubtful harvest. There is said, in Europe at least, to be more war in a day's rain than in the ill-temper of the most quarrelsome monarch, and more peace in a morning's sunshine than even in a treaty of commerce; because people, having their time occupied and their stomachs full, have neither leisure nor disposition to quarrel."

"What can be the use of so much rain, Uncle Benny?"

"Use?" returned the old man; "it has a thousand uses. Water is the great nourishment and stimulant of vegetation. Some plants will seem to live on water alone, neither needing nor receiving manure beyond what nature enables them to gather from the water below and the air above. Take one of your corn-hills as an illustration. The cornstalk stands exactly where it grew. It spreads its roots all around, but does not change its place. As it cannot travel about in search of food, such as it may need must therefore be brought to it. Who is to do this? Not you, because you supposed you had done all that was necessary when you planted the grain. It is water, the rain-water, that per-

forms this important office of bringing to the plant the food which has been deposited in the soil. A mere sprinkle will not do this; it must be just such a soaking shower as we are now having. Besides, water dissolves many substances which exist in the air as food for plants—so graciously has Heaven provided—and then, when these are brought into the soil by rains, they there come in contact with another set of substances which the plants require also, and the whole being thus combined and liquefied with water, they constitute the very food by which vegetation lives and grows. The water, thus saturated with vegetable food, travels along under ground, feeding the plants which Providence requires to remain stationary. This is one of the great uses of so much rain."

The next morning being bright and sunny, the old man piloted the boys into the two-acre cornfield they had planted. On the way thither they passed under a fine Mayduke cherry-tree, then loaded with delicious fruit. The rain and wind had shaken off quantities of cherries, which lay upon the ground. These the boys stopped to gather and eat, spitting out the stones in every direction. Noticing their actions, Uncle Benny spoke up: "Boys, when I was in Spain, I learned a proverb which has been in use in that country for centuries—'He who plants trees loves others besides himself.' It means, that, as it takes nearly a lifetime for many trees to grow and produce fruit, the chance is that he who plants the tree will hardly live long enough to eat the product, and that he must therefore love those who are to come after him, or he would not plant trees of whose fruits they are more likely to partake than he. Now, whenever a Spaniard eats a peach, a cherry or a pear by the roadside, he works out a little hole in the ground with his foot, and plants the stone; he thinks of those who are to come after him—he loves others besides himself. It is a thank-offering to the memory of the kind soul by whom the tree was planted from which he has just eaten. Hence the roadsides throughout that beautiful country are lined with abundance of the most tempting fruits, all free to every one. Boys, not one of you have ever planted a tree. It is time for you to begin. I shall never live to gather the fruit, but all of you may be spared to do so. It is our duty to leave the world as good at least as we found it—better if we can. I have no good opinion of the fellow who is content to snore under the shadow of a noble shade-tree without planting another for the next generation to enjoy, or to eat the fruit from trees which others have planted, without at sometime imitating their example. The sooner one sows, the sooner will he reap. There, boys, right along the fence, two or three for each of you."

Each boy struck his heel into the soft ground, made a slight hole, dropped into it a couple of cherry-stones, covered them over, and pressed down the earth with his foot. It was certainly a very small affair, but it was nevertheless something for the boys. Each one could not help feeling that he had done a good deed, for he had planted a tree.

"O," exclaimed the old man, "what a country this would be if every farmer would go and do likewise! The roadsides would everywhere be lined with noble trees, glorious to look upon, grateful in their shadiness, and affording bountiful harvests of delightful fruit, free to the passing traveller, and yielding a profusion even to the birds. There would be plenty of fruit for all. Even the thieves who now prey upon the fruit-grower would have no further inducement to steal."

Finding the ground too wet for hoeing, they deferred that operation for a week, when Tony ran twice over the cornfield with the cultivator, to mellow up the ground and cut off the weeds. Then all hands turned in with hoes to clean up the rows and give the corn its first hilling. Before undertaking this, Uncle Benny has brought a large file from his tool-chest, with which he had sharpened up the boys' hoes to such an edge as had never before been seen on Spangler's farm. The hoes were great, clumsy things, unfit for the hands of a small boy; but they shaved off the weeds with so much ease that the excessive weight of the tool was forgotten in the sharpness of the edge. Instead of two or three chops being required to cut up a stout weed, a single clip went clean through it. There could be no doubt that the trifling work of filing enabled the boys to get over two or three times as much ground as if they had been working with dull hoes. There was a real economy of time in thus beginning right, besides comfort and a thorough execution done upon the weeds.

[To be continued.]