

our money, and that in foreign countries they had been raised for centuries as a source of profit. They are all fond of the seeds of weeds and many wild plants, and are most industrious workers in devouring them. It is in search of such seeds that they are seen alighting in the fields at all seasons of the year, as well when no winter grain is ripening as when it is. They thus do the farmer a great service in keeping his fields clean, by preventing an increase of weeds.

No matter at what time of year a pigeon's crop may be opened, it will be found to contain at least eight times as much of the seeds of weeds as of wheat, or rye, or corn, or other grains. It is also very remarkable, that the grains thus taken from the fields are defective ones. They take only the worthless seeds. For these reasons these birds should be regarded as the best weeders that a farmer can employ; for while he merely chops up the weed, often when it is so well grown that it ripens its seeds on the ground where he may have left it, the pigeons come along and make clean work by eating them. The farmer removes merely the weeds, but the pigeons remove the cause of them.

Any one who has kept these birds on his premises must have noticed how fond they are of pecking among the rubbish which is thrown out from a barn-floor after threshing wheat or other grain. They will search there, for many days together, hunting out the shrivelled grains, the poppy-seeds and cockle, and other pests of the farm, thus getting many a good meal from seeds that barn-yard fowls never condescend to pick up. When the latter get into a garden, they scratch and tear up everything, as though they were scratching for a wager; but a pigeon is better bred by nature,—he never scratches; hence he disturbs no seeds the gardener may have planted. When he gets into the garden, it is either to get a nibble at the pea-vines or the beans, as he is extravagantly fond of both, or to search for weeds.

This fondness of the pigeon tribe for seeds of plants injurious to the farm is much better known in Europe than with us. At one time, in certain districts of France, where large numbers of pigeons had been kept, they were nearly all killed off. These districts had been famous for the fine, clean and excellent quality of the wheat raised within them. But very soon after the number of pigeons had been reduced, the land became overgrown with weeds that choked the crops. The straw, in consequence, grew thin and weak, while the grain was so deficient in plumpness and weight as to render it unfit for seed. Every farmer remarked the difference when the districts had plenty of pigeons and when they had only a few. The people therefore returned to pigeon-keeping. Every landlord,

in renting his farm, required his tenants to build a pigeon-house or dove-cot, in order to insure crops. Many of these were very expensive structures. It has been further observed in other districts in France, that where pigeons are most abundant there the wheat-fields are most productive, and that they never touch seed which has been rolled in lime.

The defence of this beautiful domestic bird which Uncle Benny thus made in reply to Mr. Spangler's objections quite disarmed him; for he had great respect for the old man's superior knowledge; and as it appeared the pigeons would not only do no harm, but would really be likely to do much good, he consented to all that was required,—the boys should have pigs, fowls, and pigeons, and two acres of ground on which to raise their food.

This extraordinary concession was made just before Christmas. It took the boys so by surprise and they were so excited by the prospect before them, that, after going to bed, they talked it over during half the night. They had not been much used to receiving Christmas presents, but if they had, and had now been overlooked, they would not have missed them. Tony's gratification was so lively that it gave a different turn to his thoughts. He forgot all about wanting to try his luck in the city, and a new ambition sprang up to remain on the farm. A motive had been created, a stimulant had been set before him; there was a prospect of his doing something he had long desired,—make a beginning.

Farmers do not understand the value to themselves, or the importance to their boys, of little concessions like these. They are the surest agencies for developing the self-reliance of a boy. When working for himself, labor becomes pastime,—it is sweetened by the hope of reward. Lessons set before the mind under such circumstances become indelibly impressed upon it, for personal experience is the best teacher of all. The farm, instead of being an object of aversion, becomes one of preference. The boy's treasure being there, there also will his heart be found. Yet this simple process for imbuing him with a fondness for rural life, and of weaning him from his undefined longings after the trials, the hazards, and the disappointments inseparable from venturing on a life in the city, is so generally neglected as to become the fruitful cause of numberless desertions of the country homestead.

As Christmas is everywhere a holiday, so it was on the Spangler farm. The boys, exuberant and gleeful, were in ecstasies when Uncle Benny told them he intended they should go with him to Trenton, see the sights, and look after pigs and pigeons. That city was but a few miles away.