

Romance of a Book Farmer

By Herbert Quick in the Saturday Evening Post

Continued from Last Week

And it was the children that gradually brought the Sharpe family into touch with the neighborhood. Jeff and Alice began by attempting to teach themselves; which was hard enough when there was only little Bailey, but became impossible when the twins, Isabel and Wyatt—named after Lord Puffin—joined the squad. Two others arrived, and at school age they had to be sent to the district school; and the first occasion on which ten of us ever saw Jeff Sharpe at the same time was when he went to the township school meeting to air his views about school matters. We found that he could talk pretty well and, after the meeting was over, he told me that if we had a few more men as able as half a dozen who were present we might do things.

Then the state college sent an alfalfa demonstration train to the county, and the professor in charge of it asked Jeff to invite the neighbors to Sharpesmoor to see what he had accomplished with alfalfa—which he did, and gave us a mighty good time. The professor took us from field to field and asked Jeff to tell us how he did it, and again we found that he was a good talker and a man of the keenest common sense. We began to forget that he had been one of Ridgeway's Pups—in fact, I had about forgotten it long before that. Alice served us tea and sandwiches and cakes, and we had the time of our lives. Two or three editors asked Jeff to write

he called England, tho he had long since become an American citizen and could be elected to county office if he wanted to be—the farmers would see to that. As for the city vote, his being a director in the Farmers' Exchange Bank would help some, I'm sure. Alice never asked him about his people, and he never told her, except that they were typical middle-class English people. Now to Alice this didn't mean much; but at what it did mean to her she was not much overjoyed. To her, upper-class people were those who were industrious and honest and not really poor; but a very poor person who was honest and very intellectual, like Mrs. Doctor Asbury at the county seat, was certainly upper class. As for other classes—there was the lower class, consisting of the worthless, criminal and immoral of society. Old Dan Fifer, who was very rich, but lived a life of open immorality and made his money as a loan shark, was certainly, to Alice's mind, a member of the lower classes, tho his ancestors came over in the Mayflower. A middle-class person, she reasoned, must be somewhere in between these; and that certainly was nothing to be proud of. Probably Geoffrey had done the only proper thing when he cut himself off from that middle-class family, since he was now indisputably upper class—honest, able, and a successful farmer, respected by all.

Therefore Alice was not lifted to any



Some of the cherished wounded British Yennies photographed at an entertainment given to them in London

for their papers. He tells me that on that day he began to have a vision of what American rural life is—as he said—"in process of becoming."

Letters From England

Well, everybody in the Corn Belt knows about O. G. Sharpe now, thru his writings for the farm press and his addresses at meetings of farmers, stockmen and people interested in rural life. He is on the school board of the Fairview Consolidated Rural School and teaches classes in feeds and feeding for Tom Whelpley. He is a member of Frank Wiggin's congregation in the old Winchesterian church, tho he also maintains his connection with the Episcopal church in the county seat. There is no more useful citizen in the county, nor a better farmer—if he did dig it all out of books. I have about made up my mind that if the rest of us would study books as he did, and intelligently modify our practice by their doctrines, it would be better for all of us; and Jeff admits that he would have saved himself a lot of mistakes if he had not been too proud to study what we were doing during those first hard years when he and Alice lay awake nights wondering whether or not they would be able to make their payments on the mortgage and prevent foreclosure. For him to have failed would have been a descent into the pit; for he had no friends then.

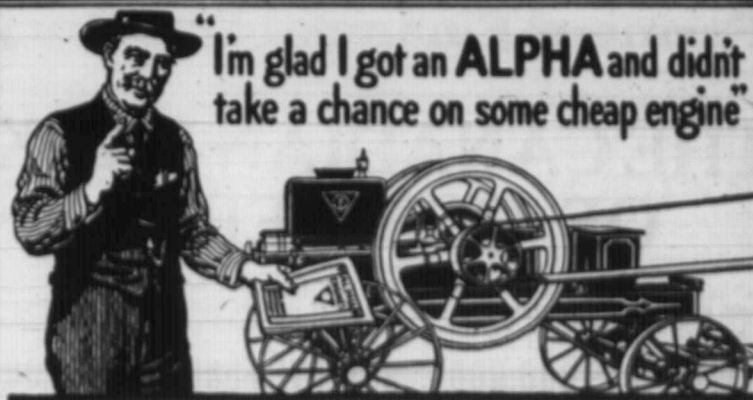
All this time Alice was wondering whether or not there was anything wrong with Jeff's history at home, as

great spiritual height when the family in England began to write Jeff. He began to speak, too, of changes in the family which seemed to make it necessary for him to go back. They wanted his advice on the family business. Evidently, Alice told my wife, they had found out that Jeff was doing well and wanted to tag along after him.

They never sent any word to Alice, nor asked for her picture nor the children's. So far as Alice knew, Jeff's family were not aware of her existence—which, as a matter of fact, they were not. Jeff admitted to me that for a year or so the exchanges of letters were very cold and businesslike. If the family circumstances had improved, as they seemed to have done, Jeff felt that it was their affair. They had inferred that he could swim in America and never looked to see whether he might not be sinking. The old estrangement had solidified with time, in Jeff's mind; and he refused to tell them about his family, or tell his family about them—he was too proud and embittered at first; and after all these years he could not approach the subject without embarrassment. He felt a barrier between him and the explanations he should have made; and finally, when it became absolutely necessary, he packed up Alice and all the children and sailed for England without explanations.

Alice came over to consult with her Aunt Lucy about the clothes she should wear. "Of course," said she, "Jeff's

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