

## The Hoarding of the Waters

By Frederick Hall

JOEL HART folded the letter and placed it in his inside pocket. It read simply:

"I leave for Denver, Friday, and will stop at Morris, to talk things over with you."

But to him those words meant much: for one thing, they represented almost the only secret that he had ever kept from his mother.

He stopped a moment at the barn door to look across the corn and wheat fields, withering beneath the fierce heat of the July sun, then he saddled Pinto and started on the ten-mile race to Morris.

Two great events in Joel's life had come the year that he was seventeen: one the death of his father and the other a change within his own heart. He sometimes thought the one had come at the time it did that he might have strength to bear the other, for Joel loved his father, and the loss that had left the home so empty had laid upon the boy's young shoulders a heavy load of responsibility.

It was chiefly for Ephraim Hart's health that the family had moved into the West, and the clear, dry air of the plains, which had done so little for their crops, had given added months of life to the hopeful, failing man. It was that which had kept up their hearts during those first two years of drought, and hundreds of settlers had given up and gone back East.

"It doesn't matter," Mrs. Hart would say, "so long as father keeps well and happy."

Joel never failed to nod assent and neighbors said:

"Well, maybe the Harts can stick it out. They've got money back East."

But only Joel and his mother knew how meager were those eastern resources, or how heavily they had been drawn upon.

Then came their year of plenty, with its generous rains, when the father, in his wheel chair upon the porch, could look across fields ripening to an abundant harvest and, in a voice which grew each day weaker, would talk of the good times which were coming, when he should once more be well and strong; the years of drought had plainly been exceptional, the soil was as fertile as any in the world, prosperity had come to stay; and Joel and his mother, who saw only too clearly the end that was coming so quickly now, encouraged him in all his hopeful prophecies.

The autumn's rich harvest had been gathered in, winter had passed and then had come exactly such a spring as they had known those first two years. Dry winds swept for days across the prairies; there was scant rain in May and almost none in June. When July came, they could see that nothing but speedy and abundant rain could save even a fraction of their crops.

"We'll be ruined if it doesn't rain," Joel said to old Dr. Cameron, to whom he had gone for advice and comfort. "We couldn't sell for the cost of our buildings. It isn't myself; I'm young and strong and I can earn a living anywhere; but mother hasn't the health she used to have, and Ruth and Sadie, they're little. They can't work, and it can't be that they are to lose all that their father saved for them when he was well and strong. And then, at the worst, we are better off than others; there are dozens, yes, hundreds who will suffer more than we shall."

"Have you ever read of the men who are cultivating parts of the Sahara?" said Dr. Cameron, suddenly looking up at the boy. "Now these western plains they may have been meant to be irrigated, or they may be best adapted to crops that you have not tried."

"It's all so new," answered Joel. "No, I never looked at it that way before. I'll—I'll have to think it out. It—" he hesitated—"it shows me up some. It's like the parable in the Bible about the houses, somewhere the floods have come and the winds blow. Of course my house has got to stand, all right, only—" his voice died out and for some moments he sat silent.

Dr. Cameron had had a hurry call to

the next town to see a patient, and Joel walked with him to the station, shook hands with him and stood watching as the train pulled slowly out. On the rear platform two men, apparently tourists, were standing, and as they were whirled past, a scrap of their conversation reached his ears:

"—Simply depends on whether dry farming—" and the rest was lost in the rumble of the train.

But the half dozen words stuck in his memory and all the way home, whenever he was not pondering what Dr. Cameron had said, he was wondering what "dry farming" might mean.

"Mother," asked Joel, as he sat down next morning at the breakfast table, "what's dry farming?"

"I don't know," she answered. "What makes you ask? I don't think I ever heard of it before."

not best for them to buy he received with a quite surprising good grace and forthwith rose to go.

It seems to have been a pretty bad year for crops, all through this section," he remarked, as he descended the steps. "It's a lack of rain," said Joel.

"How much have you had?"

"None to speak of since May."

The stranger took out a little note book and consulted it.

"You've had fourteen inches in the last year," he said.

Joel made no reply.

"Twelve inches are enough to grow forty bushels of wheat to the acre," he went on, "and in that field it doesn't look as if you'd get ten. You haven't used the rain; you've wasted it."

The stranger ended with a smile, or Joel might have retorted angrily. After his months of unremitting labor, it was not pleasant to find himself accused of being the author of his own misfortunes. "How have I wasted it?" he asked.

The stranger replied by putting another question in a quick, nervous tone: "Did you ever write to the Agricul-

tramping the country and selling books to pay expenses."

"Come in, and have some supper," said Joel.

Eldredge Brewster accepted the invitation and stayed the night. Every moment that was not spent in sleep was spent in earnest conversation, and when he left next morning, Joel walked with him down the dusty road a mile or more.

"I'll send you the books and the tool catalogues," said his new found friend, at parting. "You'll want to read it up. It would help too if you would come to the college and see one of our model farms. If ever you get 'stuck' write to me and I'll come or send some one, but in the main, all you need is to remember a few simple things. There's rain enough, this section has always had rain enough, if only it is kept from running off the surface and evaporating. To save it you must keep your sub-soil packed and your surface, your soil mulch, pulverized. Begin in the spring, as soon as the ground is dry enough to let you on it, follow your plow with the sub-soil packer and the disk harrow. Harrow after every rain. Save the water, don't let it get away from you, that's the secret of the whole thing. Keep the work up all summer and if, as you say, you have the money to skip a crop that year, and give your time and energy to getting your soil into the right condition, there isn't a reason in the world why, after that, you shouldn't have good crops every year. You won't need to depend on the weather. The work will be hard and steady, dry farming was never invented for a lazy man, but you and your hired man will be able to do it, with perhaps another horse. It is the results you are after, and when you come to try it, you will find that you use less seed and get bigger crops than you did the old way, even in the best years. Of course the irrigation ditch would help even a dry farmer, but, as you say, you won't get that for some years yet."

They shook hands and Eldredge Brewster set off down the road. Then, when he had gone a half dozen rods, he turned and came back.

"Just one thing more," he said, "don't be talked out of this. If it wasn't so pathetic, it would be funny, the way the old line farmers stick to the notion that methods which were good in Illinois, and Ohio, and New England, must be good here, and never stop to consider that there they had twice the rain fall. I've talked to such men, and men who know ten times what I do about dry farming have talked, and lectured to them, and shown them results, and still they keep on in the same old way, year after year, and fail. The hope of the country is in the young men. Don't give this up, or be talked out of it. I'll pay the expenses if you fail; only if you do as I say, you won't fail. Good-bye."

And this time he was really gone. Joel set to work as soon as the books came, reading them evenings and at odd moments. His mother joined him in the study and later, after their fields had been harvested, and, as anticipated, had proved almost a total failure, she insisted that he follow Mr. Brewster's suggestion and visit the Agricultural College and model farms, at Wapahoe.

That week's trip was to Joel a revelation. Going over the grounds of the college, with his friend, he saw corn, wheat, sorghum, potatoes, and sugar beets, all of which had grown luxuriantly under weather conditions exactly similar to those upon his own farm, seventy-five miles away. He saw, too, class rooms and laboratories in which were studied sciences which he had never known to have any bearing upon farming and, before he returned home, his last doubts had been vanquished and he had placed his order for his new tools.

### Winners at the Winnipeg Bonspiel.

C. R. Hudson (2) H. J. Kellberg (1)  
A. N. Fidler (3) G. M. Hudson (skip.)

Governor-General Cup (grand aggregate)—Won by G. M. Hudson of Kenora, Ontario.

"I heard two people talking about it yesterday, and I thought maybe it was something that would help us."

"I think it's chickens," announced Sadie.

Joel and his mother laughed, for it was a family joke that the poultry always paid, no matter what the season, but the answer did not satisfy Joel.

"I wonder if Uncle Frank would know?" he asked.

"I'll ask him, the next time I write," his mother promised.

But when the answer came it proved that Uncle Frank knew nothing whatever about dry farming. He could only guess that it must mean farming without water, which was, of course, quite absurd; and meanwhile Joel's inquiries among the neighbors had met with no better success.

About two weeks after his talk with Dr. Cameron a stranger called at Joel's house. His costume was a dark gray knickerbocker suit and leggings. A pair of glasses extremely concave made his eyes seem to protrude like those of some great insect, and the resemblance was heightened by his large head and slight, wiry figure. He was canvassing for a book, and, because strangers were rare, he was made welcome and sat for twenty minutes discoursing upon the merits of his volume. The decision that it was

tural Department about your troubles, may I ask?"

"No," answered Joel. "Len Stewart said it wouldn't do any good."

"Ever visit the Agricultural College at Wapahoe?"

"No."

"Ever visit one of their model farms?"

"No."

"You've a hired man?"

"Yes."

"Do you use a sub-soil packer?"

"No."

"Dry farming—"

And then of a sudden Joel fell upon that book agent and seized him, as if he feared that he might take to his heels and escape down the road.

"See here," he exclaimed. "What is dry farming? I've been trying for months to find out."

They sat down on the steps and talked.

After a while they rose and walked about from one part of the farm to another, inspecting and discussing it, not heeding the time, while the sun sank lower and lower in the western sky.

"Where did you find out all this?" asked Joel, as the twilight began to close about them. "Who are you, anyhow?"

"I'm a sort of missionary—in disguise," answered the stranger. "I teach at Wapahoe. This is vacation time and so I'm

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