

"I WOULD RATHER BE NOBODY."

BY LADY HOPZ

"Did you ever swallow a candle, Mrs. Field?"

"Whatever do you mean, boy? You are a rare one for asking questions."

Mrs. Field was the farmer's wife, who at this moment was busy entertaining the farm servants, laborers, and helpers at the harvest supper. For this was the day when the Harvest Home was held—the great annual festivity which crowned the year's work of digging, sowing, ploughing, reaping, and gathering in the crops that are so precious for the year's supply of human need. Mr. Field was, as times go, a moderately prosperous farmer; and, if we must whisper it, we will say that he owed much of his prosperity to his better half, the excellent Mrs. Field, who now, with dexterous hands and skilful knife, carries helping after helping of steaming roast meat that her guests may be well served, and satisfied.

"He is a funny chap," said Brown, the ploughman,

"Ask Jem, then, he can tell you reasons for every-thing, better than I can," was the reply.

"Well," said Jem, poised his knife between his finger and thumb, and gravely studying the kitchen ceiling, after he had drained his second pot of beer, "because—because it's hot. That is one thing. And then, it is unwholesome. That is another thing. So, don't you see, it hurts! And it's uncomfortable like. And nobody don't do it. That's another reason. Besides, candles isn't good food. And whoever in this wide world would want to eat a lighted candle, I should like to know?"

"But you like your beer?"

"Of course I do!"

And everybody laughed heartily, as not the faintest connection was traceable between the two ideas, or facts, whichever you may like to call them.

"Well, your beer is hot, and if you get to like it, it sets you all on fire, and makes you queer."

"What a joke!" said Bill, the woodchopper, whose spare time was spent, much to his detriment, in the

unlawfully in the vegetable garden. Whilst he was away Mrs. Field called round her some of the farm men. As they seated themselves in the house parlour, and whilst Mr. Field talked with Albert Jones about the prospects of the season, Mrs. Field said in her quiet homely way—

"Andrew's home has been spoilt by drink, so the boy feels about it keenly. His father, after wasting some money that had been left him, died a poor fellow, without a penny, and without a good name, which is, after all, a precious heritage for any lad. His mother pined away, and not liking the energy to reclaim her disappointed life, she died two years ago, leaving this boy, and one little girl. Mr. Albert Jones, my good neighbour here, adopted them both, and the boy has come to work for us. This is his history. And I see that he is a good thoughtful fellow, and industrious too. But his safety is his hatred of liquor in any form, he is a genuine, little teetotaler. And now, men, what do you say to the plan of mine? Supposing we start for this farm a 'Nobody Goes it' association, and we



The Talk of the Table at Farmer Field's Harvest Supper.

[Drawn by J. J. Decker.]

as he looked across the table at Andrew Norton, the little cross-questioner at the other end of it.

Quite absorbed in his own ideas, Andrew followed up his inquiry by another—

"Would you like to swallow a candle, Mrs. Field?"

"No, certainly not!" said that good woman, still eating desperately, as though her very fortune depended on what she was doing. "I can not a rat, nor yet a mouse—for they do like tallow—nor am I like the copper that comes to England, and makes believe such folly as that. He gets round to eat them, but he pushes them up his throat, or does something or other with them. Why do you ask such a question, my boy?"

"Because I wanted to know. That it all I'll try wouldn't you like to eat a candle, Mrs. Field—a lighted one, I mean?" pursued the lad.

"A lighted one? Why, that is worse still," she said, laying down her knife and fork, and beginning to attend her own share of the repast. "You must not ask such questions, you know. Who would like to eat a lighted candle? Eh, who would do such a thing?"

Because—

small alcoholic, called "King George's Arms," in the nearest village.

"Don't laugh at him," remarked the "wise old farmer" at the other end. "The boy knows a thing or two, that he does. So you wouldn't eat a lighted candle, would you, my boy?"

"No! nor drink a glass of beer. Because it's eating good money, and it's not like wholesome food, or meat, or bread. It makes chops hot. I have seen 'em almost dead, and walking all around as if they couldn't move their feet rightly."

"The boy is right," said Mrs. Field.

"But everybody takes it," muttered Sykes, the carter.

"Then I'd rather be nobody," said the boy. "For I wouldn't have it—no, not if you was to give me ever so much. I would rather have the lighted candle; because, don't you see, if you once swallowed a candle you would never want another. And if you have a glass of beer, of course you must always have another."

The laugh was general now, for there was wit and sharpness in the boy's words.

When the harvest supper was concluded Andrew ran out to see after the young calves. Some of them had pushed open the latch and were amusing themselves

will try how we can do without the beer. It may seem hard at first, but it will be best in the end. And at the next Harvest Home we will put on the table all the money that we have saved by just saying 'no,' and becoming a 'nobody,' in fact. And then we will see how much it all comes to. Apart from considering our own benefit, I should be grieved, and so would you, if this boy were to lose his strong principles, or any other young men were to get them through our example."

With acclamation this proposal was carried, and the men, who readily saw it would be for their advantage to do it, started forthwith this society of reasonable nobodies.

Of course, they had to endure plenty of persecution and hector as the days and the months passed by, but in due time the harvest supper came round again. That table was a sight to see. In place of the tankards, each man had before him his small board of savings, some on a little log, and others represented by the yellow Post-Office Savings Bank book. Once more the farmer's wife carried the joint, and by her side sat Andrew the orphan boy. It is not surprising that every foot contributed out of his savings according to place before the lad as a token of esteem.

