

Out on the Pampas

By G. A. HENTY

CHAPTER X.—(Continued.)

The cotton crop had proved a success; the field had in time been covered with cotton plants, which had burst first into a bright yellow blossom, and had then been covered with many balls of white fluff. The picking the cotton had been looked upon at first as great fun, although it had proved hard work before it was finished. Its weight had rather exceeded Mr. Hardy's anticipation. The process of cleaning the cotton from the pods and seeds had proved a long and troublesome operation, and had taken an immense time. Judging by the progress that they at first made with it, they really began to despair of ever finishing it, but with practice they became more adroit. Still it was found to be too great a labor during the heat of the day, although carried on within doors. It had been a dirty work, too; the light particles of fluff had got everywhere, and at the end of a couple of hours' work the party had looked like a family of bakers. Indeed, before more than a quarter of the quantity raised was cleaned they were heartily sick of the job, and the remainder was sold in the pod to an Englishman who had brought out machinery, and was attempting to raise cotton near Buenos Ayres. Although the profits had been considerable, it was unanimously determined that the experiment should not be repeated, at any rate for the present.

Mr. Hardy had not at first carried out his idea of planting a couple of acres with tobacco and sugar cane, the ground having been required for other purposes. He had not, however, abandoned the idea; and about two months before the marriage of Terence and Sarah he had planted some tobacco, which was, upon their return from Buenos Ayres, ready to be picked.

The culture of tobacco requires considerable care. The ground is first prepared with great care, and is well and thoroughly manured; but this was not required in the present case, as the rich virgin soil needed no artificial aid. It is then dug in beds something like asparagus beds, about two feet wide, with a deep trench between each. The seeds are raised in a seed-bed, and when nine or ten inches high they are taken up and carefully transplanted into the beds, two rows being placed in each, and the plants being a foot apart.

There are various methods of cultivation, but this was the one adopted by Mr. Hardy. The plants grew rapidly, the ground between them being occasionally hoed, and kept free from weeds. When they were four feet high the tops were nipped off, and any leaves which showed signs of disease were removed. Each stem had from eight to ten leaves. When the leaves began to turn rather yellow, Mr. Hardy announced that the time for cutting had arrived, and one morning all hands were mustered to the work. It consisted merely in cutting the stems at a level with the earth, and laying the plants down gently upon the ground. By breakfast time the two acres were cleared. They were left all day to dry in the sun, and a little before sunset they were taken up and carried up to one of the store sheds, which had been cleared and prepared for the purpose. Here they were placed in a heap on the ground, covered over with raw hides and mats, and left for three days to heat. After this they were uncovered and hung up on laths from the roof, close to each other, and yet sufficiently far apart to allow the air to circulate between them. Here they remained until they were quite dry, and were then taken down, a damp covering being chosen for the operation, as otherwise the dry leaves would have crumbled to dust. They were again laid in a heap, and covered up to allow them to heat once more. This second heating required some days to accomplish, and this operation required great attention, as the tobacco would have been worthless if the plants had heated too much.

In ten days the operation was complete. The leaves were then stripped off, the upper leaves were placed by themselves, as also the middle and the lower leaves; the higher ones being of the finest quality. They were then tied in bundles of twelve leaves each, and were packed in layers in barrels, a great pressure being applied with a weighted lever, to press them down into an almost solid mass. In all they filled three barrels, the smallest of which, containing three pounds of the finest tobacco. The venture, like that of the cotton, had proved a success, but the trouble and care required had been very great.

The next experiment which was perfected was that with the sugar cane. In this, far more than in the others, Mrs. Hardy and the girls took a lively interest. Sugar had been one of the few articles of consumption which had cost money, and it had been used in considerable quantities for converting the fruit into fine puddings and preserves. It was not contemplated to make sugar for sale, but only for the supply of the house; two acres, therefore, was the extent of the plantation. Mr. Hardy procured the cuttings from a friend who had a small sugar plantation near Buenos Ayres.

The cultivation of sugar cane is simple. The land having been got in perfect order, deep furrows were plowed at a distance of five feet apart. In these the cuttings, which are pieces of the upper part of the cane, containing two or three knots, were laid at a distance of three feet apart. The plow was then taken along by the side of the furrow, so as to fill it up again and cover the cuttings. In sugar plantations the rows of canes are close together, but Mr. Hardy had chosen this

distance, as it enabled his horse hoe to work between them, and thus keep the ground turned up and free from weeds without the expense of hard labor. In a short time the shoots appeared above the soil. In four months they had gained the height of fourteen feet, and their glossy stems showed that they were ready to cut.

"Now, Clara," Mr. Hardy said, "this is your manufacture, you know, and we are only to work under your superintendence. The canes are ready to cut; how do you intend to crush the juice out? because that is really an important question."

The young Hardys looked aghast at each other, for in the pressure of other matters the question of apparatus for the sugar manufacture had been quite forgotten.

"Have you really no idea how to do it, Frank?"

"No, really I have not, my dear. We have certainly no wood on the place which would make the rollers; besides, it would be rather a difficult business."

Mrs. Hardy thought for a minute, and then said: "I should think that the mangle would do it."

There was a general exclamation of "Capital, mamma!" and then a burst of laughter at the idea of making sugar with a mangle. The mangle in question was part of a patent washing apparatus which Mr. Hardy had brought with him from England, and consisted of two strong iron rollers, kept together by string springs, and turning with a handle.

"I do think that the mangle would do, Clara," Mr. Hardy said, "and we are all much obliged to you for the idea. I had thought of the great washing copper for boiling the sugar, but the mangle altogether escaped me. We will begin tomorrow. Please get all the tubs scrubbed out and scalded, and put out in the sun to dry."

"How long will it take, papa?"

"Some days, Ethel; we must only cut the canes as fast as the boiler can boil the juice down."

The next day the work began. The canes were cut at a level with the ground, the tops taken off, and the canes cut into lengths of three feet. They were then packed on a bullock cart and taken up to the house. They were next passed through the mangle, which succeeded admirably, the juice flowing out in streams into the tub placed below to receive it. When all the canes had been passed through the mangle, the screws were tightened to increase the pressure, and they were again passed through, by which time, although the juice was not so thoroughly extracted as it would have been by a more powerful machine, the quantity that remained was not important. As the tub was filled the contents were taken to the great copper, under which a fire was then lighted. The crushing of the canes was continued until the copper was nearly full, when Mr. Hardy ordered the cutting of the canes to be discontinued for the day. The fire under the copper was fed with the crushed canes, which burned very freely. Mr. Hardy now added a small quantity of lime and some sheep's blood, which last ingredient caused many exclamations of horror from Mrs. Hardy and the young ones. The blood, however, Mr. Hardy informed them, was necessary to clarify the sugar, as the albumen contained in the blood would rise to the surface, bringing the impurities with it. The fire was continued until the thermometer showed that the syrup was within a few degrees of boiling, and the surface was covered with a thick, dark-colored scum. The fire was then removed, and the liquor allowed to cool, the family now going about other work, as so large a quantity of liquor would not be really cold until the next day.

The following morning the tap at the bottom of the boiler was turned, and the syrup came out bright and clear—about the color of sherry wine. The scum descended unbroken on the surface of the liquor; and when the copper was nearly empty the tap was closed, and the scum and what little liquor remained was taken out. The bright syrup was now again poured into the boiler; the fire relighted, and the syrup was kept boiling to evaporate the water and condense the syrup down to the point at which it would crystallize. It required many hours' boiling to effect this, any scum which rose to the surface being carefully taken off with a skimmer. At last it was found that the syrup on the skimmer began to crystallize and Mr. Hardy pronounced it to be fit to draw off into the large washing tubs to crystallize. A fresh batch of canes was now crushed, and so the process was repeated until all the canes were cut. It took a fortnight altogether, but only five days of this were actually occupied in cutting and crushing the canes. As the sugar crystallized it was taken out—a dark, pulpy looking mass, at which the young Hardys looked very doubtfully—and was placed in a large sugar hogshead, which had been procured for the purpose. In the bottom of this eight large holes were bored, and these were stopped up with pieces of plaitain stalk. Through the porous substance of these stalks the molasses or treacle slowly drained off. As the wet sugar was placed in the cask, layers of slices of plaitain stems were laid upon it, as the spongy substance draws the dark coloring matter out from the sugar. The plaitain grows freely in South America, and Mr. Hardy had planted a number of this graceful tree near his house; but these had not been advanced enough to cut, and he had, therefore, procured a

sufficient quantity from a friend at Rosario. It was three months before the drainage of the molasses quite ceased; and the Hardys were greatly pleased, on emptying the hogshead and removing the plaitain stems, to find that their sugar was dry and of a fairly light color. The sugar canes did not require planting again, as they will grow for many years from the same roots; and although the canes from old stools, as they are called, produce less sugar than those of the first year's planting, the juice is clearer and requires far less trouble to prepare and refine. Before another year came round the boys made a pair of wooden rollers of eighteen inches in diameter. These were covered with strips of hoop iron, nailed lengthways upon them at short intervals from each other, thereby obtaining a better grip upon the canes and preventing the wood from being bruised and grooved. These rollers were worked by a horse mill, which Mr. Hardy had ordered from England. It was made for five horses, and did a great deal of useful work, grinding the Indian corn into fine flour for home consumption and for sale to neighboring settlers, and into coarse meal, and pulping the pumpkins and roots for the pigs and other animals.

Mr. Hardy also tried many other experiments, as the climate is suited to almost every kind of plant and vegetable. Among them was the cultivation of ginger, of the vanilla bean, of flax, hemp and coffee. In all of them he obtained more or less success; but the difficulty of obtaining labor, and the necessity of devoting more and more attention to the increasing flocks, herds and irrigated land prevented him from carrying them out on a large scale.

CHAPTER XI.

It was now more than eighteen months since the Hardys had been fairly established at Mount Pleasant. Everything was prospering beyond Mr. Hardy's most sanguine expectations. More and more land was monthly being broken up and irrigated. Large profits had been realized by buying lean cattle during the dry season, fattening them upon alfalfa, and sending them down to Rosario for sale. The pigs had multiplied astonishingly; and the profits from the dairy were increasing daily, as more cows were constantly added. The produce of Mount Pleasant was so valued at both Rosario and Buenos Ayres that the demand, at most remunerative prices, far exceeded the supply.

Charley was now eighteen, a squarely built, sturdy young fellow. From his life of exposure in the open air he looked older than he was. He had a strong idea that he was now becoming a man; and Ethel had one day detected him examining his cheeks very closely in the glass to see if there were any signs of whiskers. Hubert was nearly seventeen; he was taller and slighter than his brother, but was younger both in appearance and manners. He had all the restlessness of a boy, and lacked somewhat of Charley's steady perseverance.

Maud was fifteen. Her constant out-of-door exercise had made her as nimble and active as a young fawn. Ethel wanted three months of fourteen, and looked under twelve. She was quite the home-bird of the family, and liked nothing better than taking her work and sitting by the hour, quietly talking to her mother.

The time was now again approaching when the Indian forays were to be expected. Late one afternoon Mr. Fitzgerald had gone out for a ride with Mr. Hardy. Charley had gone down to the dam with his gun on his shoulder, and Hubert had ridden to a pool in the river at some distance off, where he had the day before observed a wild duck, which he believed to be a new sort. The cattle and hocks had just been driven in by Lopez and two mounted peons at an earlier hour than usual, as Mr. Hardy had that morning given orders that the animals were all to be in their inclosures before dusk. The laborers in the fields below were still at work plowing. Ethel was in the sitting room, working with Mrs. Hardy, while Maud was in the garden, picking some fruit for tea.

Presently the occupants of the parlor were startled by a sharp cry from Maud, and in another instant she flew into the room, rushed at a bound to the fireplace, snatched down her light rifle from its hooks over the mantel, and, crying, "Quick, Ethel, your rifle!" was gone again in an instant.

Mrs. Hardy and Ethel sprang to their feet, too surprised for the moment to do anything, and then Mrs. Hardy repeated Maud's words, "Quick, Ethel, your rifle!"

Ethel seized it, and with her mother ran to the door. Then they saw a sight which brought a scream from both their lips. Mrs. Hardy fell on her knees and covered her eyes, while Ethel, after a moment's pause, grasped the rifle, which had nearly fallen from her hands, and ran forward, though her limbs trembled so that they could scarcely carry her on.

The sight was indeed a terrible one. At a distance of two hundred yards Hubert was riding for his life. His hat was off, his gun was gone, his face was deadly pale. Behind him rode three Indians. The nearest one was immediately behind him, at a distance of scarce two horses' length; the other two were close to their leader. All were evidently gaining upon him.

(To be continued.)

Her Gentle Protest.
"There were nearly twenty-three strikes in the last twenty-three years!" he exclaimed as he turned from the industrial news.

"Now, Charley, dear!" said young Mrs. Torkins, "do let us talk about something else than baseball!"—Washington Star.

Here! on what.
Doctor—Do you ever have ringing sounds in your ears?
Patient—Certainly. I'm a telephone girl.—Philadelphia Record

Woman's Best Friend.

Patience—Woman is woman's best friend, after all.

Patrice—I guess you're right.
"Certainly I'm right. Even when she is getting married doesn't a man give her away and the maid of honor stand up for her?"—Yonkers Statesman.

Sign Wasn't Right.

He—I wonder why Miss Elderly never married?

She—Oh, I suppose she was born in the wrong time of the moon.

He—The wrong time of the moon?
She—Yes, there wasn't any man in it.

Bored Her.

"There is something about Mr. Squinch that bores me," commented the fair young thing, "but I can't say exactly what it is. There is simply some undefinable yet perfectly apparent attribute of the man that has that effect on me."

"I don't wonder," said the friend. "I never could endure him. He is such a peculiar looking man, with his gimlet eyes and—"

"That's just it!" exclaimed the fair young thing.—Chicago Tribune.

The Limit.

Bridge—And you go right to eating soggy bread and half-cooked meats. For heaven's sake, why don't you discharge your cook and get another one?

Pike—Well, you see, old fellow, so far as I can find out the courts won't grant you a divorce for bad cooking.—Boston Evening Transcript.

Borrowing Trouble.

Mildred (a college girl to her roommate)—Katherine, if you will lend me \$10 I shall be everlastingly indebted to you.

Katherine (who speaks from experience)—I don't doubt it.—Smart Set.

Hero Worship.

Jim—What do you mean by hero worship?

Jam—It is the brief admiration we feel for a great man immediately before we begin to rip him up the back and begin writing letters to the newspapers attacking his character and utterances.—Baltimore Herald.

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