

Women Who Work in American Fields



WOMEN WITH BABIES WORK.



WHEELING IN HER HALF-DAY'S PICKING.



SHE HOES AND WEEDS.

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T AN American in Europe it looks strange to see women at work in the fields. He thinks it a sign of superior civilization that in the United States women do not commonly till the crops. Yet within the limits of the city from which he said hundreds of women are today employed as farm laborers, and within a few miles' radius of New York may be found more than 3,000 women farmers and farm hands.

In fact, if the returned tourist were to explore the country roads to the south of the village of Jamaica, Long Island, he might almost think himself back in Austria or Italy, so gay are headkerchiefs and the cotton dresses of the small brown-skinned, bright-eyed women who are everywhere busy in the flat, level fields. Toward evening when the sun is setting behind the trees of Woodhaven, gilding in the distance the spire of the little Italian church, the tourist might see before him many a scene suggestive of Millet's "Angelus." The woman with the hoe is as common as she is picturesque in the landscape.

Crowded in the tenements of Jamaica live at least 1,000 women who are employed more or less steadily on the surrounding truck farms. Here is another foreign touch for the traveler. In former days the European peasant was a village dweller for the sake of security—as in brigand-cursed Sicily he still must be going out in the morning to work in perhaps distant fields. The habit thus established has lived and has been transplanted and joined with convenience and the social instinct, it explains why there are huddled in Hicksville, Mineola, Woodhaven and especially in Jamaica, the Poles, Bohemians, French, Italians, Slovaks, whose work on the Long Island farms may be miles away.

Long Island's women farm hands are mainly Poles from Russian Poland. They work for American, Irish and German truck farmers, who hire them by the day. In harvest time when a farmer needs women laborers he lays in a stock of \$1 bills and passes the word to one of his men. The man stops the first Pole he meets and points to a field. Few Poles speak English, but the sign is enough. The man's work is done. Next morning at the farm gate there may be fifty women waiting.

The farmer who lives at a distance from the village uses a different method. Harnessing a big hay cart, he drives to town, halts, beckons to a group of women in the

street, waits until twenty or more have scrambled in, and then drives off with his capture. His object is to prevent the straggling of his help and to make sure of the number wanted; but in the dewy freshness of the early morning the wagon loads of laughing girls look less like laborers than a picnic party.

Women are employed for planting on one, for harvesting crops that are picked by hand, such as green peas, string beans, lima beans and tomatoes; for bunching rhubarb and for weeding tender crops, like onions and young carrots, that cannot stand the cultivator.

In planting time and in June and September, when the first and second crops of peas are gathered, the outflooding of women is sudden. One may see as many as fifty at work in a plot of a few acres where the day before there was not one.

"They say labor's scarce in the west," said one farmer; "it's plenty here. Whistle and you'll see a dozen women comin'." Another farmer said that Poles were as thick as mosquitoes.

In June, when green peas must be rushed to market and every day's delay means monetary loss, the larger farmers need all the help they can get, so even women with babies are set picking. Up and down the fields, between long, straight, green rows of vines, stand baby carriages, covered with mosquito netting. While the mothers work the babies sleep or kick in the sunshine.

As soon as children are old enough to pull a pod, they, too, are called into service, and at noon when work stops and the luncheon of rye bread, cheese and onions is eaten, the scene is festive. Groups gather by families under trees or shelters thatched with green boughs. Sometimes, among Italian or French laborers, there is singing.

The wages received by women farm hands are better than might be supposed. For filling a two-bushel bag of peas a picker gets 25 cents; for beans half as much. At these rates a good hand earns \$1.50 per day. One reason for comparatively high earnings is curious: The old two-bushel bag has shrunk gradually in size until now it holds only a bushel and a half. The farmers have tried to substitute the bushel as the unit of measure, but the women object, and bag measure is still customary.

To insure industry the farmers, when possible, pay by quantity. Some have even

tried to pay for weeding by the row, but as rows in different fields are of different lengths, pay by time is more convenient. The usual rates are 75 cents or \$1 per day.

Even when hiring by the week, the farmers pay their help daily. Every afternoon the farmer appears in the fields carrying a leather bag filled with silver or \$1 bills, and the women form in line to receive their earnings. The farmer says he takes this trouble because he cannot tell the women apart, and if he waited until Saturday night there might be endless confusion in his payrolls.

At pea-picking and hand-weeding one sometimes sees Polek men working side by side with women, but not usually. The male laborer drives the cultivator, or is told off for heavy work. Indeed, the Polek man is less apt than his wife to be a farmhand. He digs cellars or sewers and works on roads and railroads. When he is employed on the farm, he is usually a hand hired by the year and given, when help is scarce, to bringing forward his wife and daughters to eke out the family income.

Flocking in village tenements, the Long Island Poles remain as old-world in habits as they might in a New York "quarter." They speak little English. The women wear headkerchiefs, black sometimes, as often white or red. Some wear hoods, many work bareheaded. They wear short, full cotton skirts and big aprons. Many work barefooted, their tanned soles peeping out in rows behind their skirts as they kneel at weeding.

They are not easy subjects for the wandering photographer. Sometimes they run from the "devil in the box," sometimes they are afraid of being victims of some scheme. "No gotta no monna todaya," they scream at sight of the camera. Even a bit of silver dropped in each hand needs a minute to teach them that money for once is passing in a pleasant direction. Then what a change from suspicion! Down on the grass they fling themselves, laughing, chattering, pulling their aprons, watching as eagerly as children.

By 3 o'clock in the afternoon, when market wagons start for the city, pea-picking stops. This gives the women time for fagot gathering. Some landowners pay their help partly by giving the run of a wood lot. By 5 o'clock through the country lanes the women are moving village-ward, wheeling fagots in a barrow, carry-

ing them in up-turned aprons or bundled upon their heads, just as their foremothers in Europe have done for centuries.

At every turn one feels the foreign touch—in the women washing at the brook-sides; in Sunday groups of holiday-seekers shooting sparrows. It is because Italy is so new a nation that it has few preserves and no well-enforced game laws that the Long Island Italian, walking out from the village with his wife, his children and his gun, follows "la caccia" over ground that shelters no game bigger than field mice, thus compelling the farmer to plant his acres thick with "No Hunting" signs.

Few Poles own land, and so in mid-summer, when weeding grows slack and the late "picking crops" are not ripe, troops of women move from farm to farm, begging work. Every English-speaking farmer is to them a "boss" or "bosso," while the farmer's sons and brothers are distinguished as "Bosso Jim" or "Bosso Pete." If Bosso Pete needs no help, he finds it hard to make the woman understand; they know no English. If, on the other hand, he wants them there is less trouble.

Across Long Island sound, in Connecticut, a busy time for women farm hands comes with the corn harvest. Italian women are engaged for the husking, and no one who has seen a group of them surround a cart loaded with corn, pushing and puffing it to the barn, will doubt their capacity.

Farm work may seem to many undesirable for women, yet it is the task at which these women can best support themselves, brought up to it as they were from childhood. They are used mainly on the light crop, and, though their dark cheeks do not show the red of northern blood, they look healthy.

The Frenchwomen, of whom there are many around Woodhaven, chat at their work. The other foreigners are less vivacious. They are slow of motion and enduring. The farmers say that a Polek woman does nearly a man's work, and does it as easily. Her movements are not jerky, like an American woman's, but steady and patient. A farmer unconsciously expressed the difference when he said that Poleks were like cows. An American woman is like a nervous filly.

It is a common remark among city doctors that Swedish and German girls taken from the outdoor work of Europe and confined in American kitchens, often lose their red cheeks and their strength after a year or two of service. The change to indoor

work saps their vitality. The Polek farm laborer is saved from slaving in a city sweat shop. Her wages are higher, her working day is shorter; she is never employed more than ten hours. With her habit of huddling with her kind in tenements, outdoor work is her only chance of continued vigor. And it is the only chance of her children, who are now getting, no a paltry "fresh air week," but plenty of oxygen for a good share of the year.

It is only the Polek, the newest immigrant to Long Island, that has no land. The Italian, who came a little earlier, may lease from four to seven acres, paying from \$150 to \$250 per year and having the right of fagot-gathering in the large farmer's wood lot. The rate of his lease is high, but the land is valuable and he is making money.

The German, who comes before the Italian, usually owns the land he works, from ten to twenty acres. His wife works by his side. She may even run a plow, but she never is employed on another man's farm. As time goes on and the family holdings increase, she is relieved from out-of-door work, and her daughters are brought up with all the advantages that prosperity can offer.

Before the German came the Irishman. He has long been among the wealthiest of Long Island farmers.

Newcomers in America are moving along the road over which the older settlers have traveled. In colonial times the pioneer had only his family to depend upon. Outside help was unattainable. So to the man's lot fell the clearing of land, building and plowing, while women were glad to help with hoeing, haying and harvesting. In the west today in regions where to some extent pioneer conditions prevail, women often work in harvesting time, such as driving the horse rake. So in the northwest among the Russian and Scandinavian settlers, pioneer conditions and inherited habit have made of women an important element in farm labor.

Sometimes it happens that even long residence in the older states of America does not wean women from outdoor work, as appears in Pennsylvania, where among the descendants of the Hessians and Moravians of revolutionary days, field labor is common among women.

These and other groups of women farm hands, added to the Mexican fruit pickers of California and to negro laborers in the south, make up in the United States an unexpected total of 450,000 laborers.

JAMES HEATON.

Gleanings From the Story Tellers' Pack

S OON after our troops took possession of Manila a certain toll bridge which connected the city with one of its suburbs was declared free to all passengers, says the Brooklyn Eagle.

Subsequently, however, the toll system was restored, but, as the bridge was largely used by soldiers who declined to recognize the bridgekeeper's right to tax them, the tax law was more honored in the breach than in the observance. Among the civilians in Manila at the time was Congressman Hull, chairman of the house committee on military affairs. One evening he started to walk across the bridge. The keeper stopped him and demanded toll. Mr. Hull, who thought the bridge was free, refused to pay.

"I am an American citizen," he protested, "and I won't pay toll."

"No," returned the bridge guard. "You are not Americano."

"But I am."

"No, no. If you were Americano you would have said, 'Go to hell!' when I asked for money."

Mr. Hull says that he paid the toll, but when he came that way again he established his claim to his citizenship by imitating the soldiers. He did it merely for the sake of the experiment, as he is not naturally a profane man. The bridgekeeper at once recognized the convincing force of his argument, and, bowing profoundly, permitted him to pass.

Wilhelm Busch, the German humorist and comic artist, received the following message from the kaiser the other day: "To the poet and artist whose splendid creations, full of genuine humor, will live imperishable among the German people, I express my sincere congratulations on the occasion of his seventieth birthday. May a beautiful evening be vouchsafed to his life."

In gratitude for the many merry hours which you give him.—William, I. R."

When the late J. Sterling Morton was secretary of agriculture Mr. Robinson, the statistician of the department, was a free-

silver man. As usual he took his thirty days vacation during the summer of 1895 and on his return applied to the disbursing officer for his pay. He was told that the secretary desired to see him before he re-

ceived his money. Robinson went to the secretary's office anticipating a promotion or something equally agreeable. He was greeted pleasantly by the secretary, who remarked that he had a surprise in store

for him. Then he told the free silver statistician that he had come to the conclusion that his (Robinson's) financial views deserved more consideration than they had hitherto received from the secretary, and, as Robinson had frequently said he would be delighted to see every one in the United States compelled by law to transact all his business in silver coin, he should have that privilege, if the general public did not, so Mr. Morton had ordered the disbursing officer to pay him his salary in standard silver dollars. Robinson had nothing to do but take the money. The bag weighed twelve pounds and the secretary solicitously cautioned him not to let it drop on his toes.

The German officer is nothing if not practical, so there may be an element of truth in the following amusing incident, which comes from Berlin," says the London Express:

A sergeant was perplexed how to deal with a bowlegged recruit. At last he thought himself of a plan. Taking a 1 mark piece, about the size of a shilling, he ordered the recruit to put it between his knees, and said, "Woe betide you if you let the money fall before I come back in five minutes."

The unhappy recruit, with knees pressed together, remained in that uncomfortable position for a minute and at last, struck by a happy idea, he took the coin from between his knees and put it in his pocket.

When the sergeant hove in sight he hurriedly replaced what he thought to be the same coin. It was, however, a 2-mark piece, about as large as a florin. The sergeant smiled as he complimented the bowlegged recruit on the great pressure as must have exerted on the coin between his knees.



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