

Bright Boys and Girls of Nebraska Are Wide Awake Club Workers

In 1905 there was organized in Nebraska under the direction and supervision of the state school superintendent, in cooperation with the agricultural college and state university, what was known as Boys' and Girls' Agricultural Clubs. These clubs represented county organizations and were made available through the public schools of the county. The purpose was to draw the attention of the boys to farm interests, encourage them in the growing of crops, and the girls in the study and practice of household economics, domestic science, typically speaking.

In order to stimulate interest in this work there was a big fall contest, planned to take place at Lincoln, the capital of the state, where the produce of the season's efforts were to be gathered together for comparison, to be passed upon under judgment of a board of experts and prizes awarded to the best in competition, in all lines of production. The State Board of Agriculture and other allied interests contributing toward the prize fund. It resulted in establishing the wisdom of the movement and one destined for great popularity with public sentiment. The corn raising spirit that it encouraged in the boys and the egg cooking ambition with the girls have all influenced to a very popular form of organization in the state of Boys' and Girls' clubs.



GRETNA SCHOOL CHILDREN AT THE NATIONAL CORN EXPOSITION.

some responsible state educational influence; agricultural college, state school superintendent, extension department state university, State Farmers' Institute association, United States Department of Agriculture, or other equally determined force that means success. Nebraska leads in number of counties organized, having fifty-nine, and is second to New York in membership, having 25,000.

New York was the first state to introduce the Farm Boys' and Girls' clubs, which now have an aggregate membership of 75,000. The prize winning exhibits in the local school and county contests of New York are taken to the state exhibit held each year at the College of Agriculture. At the 1909 meeting there were 450 ten-acre exhibits of corn at their own show, about one-third of which came from twenty-eight boys' and girls' clubs. There were also exhibited about 150 drawings on corn subjects, 130 essays on "How to Grow Corn," and 300 letters on "How We Celebrated Corn Day in Our School." New York made its first effort in organization of boys' and girls' clubs in 1898, under the auspices of the college of agriculture of Cornell university. New York has had marked success in the growth and development of its boys' and girls' clubs.

There has been introduced this year a new work will be introduced as the demands require.

Short Course in January.

For the annual state meeting of the Nebraska Boys' and Girls' clubs, to be held at Lincoln, January 18 to 20, 1911, there will be arranged a short course of one week in cooking, sewing and home nursing at the University of Nebraska, in the department of home economics. Arrangements will be made by which girls may be sent as delegates from each county, according to the plan arranged by the county superintendent. The delegates from each county will be permitted to enter the short course and receive free instruction during the week. It is expected that a cooking contest will be held in each county and that a cooking team of two girls will be sent to the state meeting, where they will compete with the teams from the various counties, for which trophies or premiums will be arranged.

Clubs in Fifty Counties.

For the boys, short courses in agriculture will be offered, and judging contests conducted, in which the boys' teams from the various counties will compete. Full statements of plans will be given in announcements for the state meeting.

There are now approximately fifty counties in Nebraska that have organized under the home experiment department of Boys' and Girls' clubs. This new department in agricultural education, in which the agricultural college and experiment stations are taken to the home and farm by means of a system of correspondence instruction, is one of the most practical efforts in agricultural training yet introduced.

The organizing of this department of the work in Nebraska has been placed in the hands of A. E. Nelson and Miss Gertrude Rowan of the Agricultural college, who are reporting the most encouraging support throughout the state in organizing the public schools of the counties into Boys' and Girls' clubs, under the home experiment department.

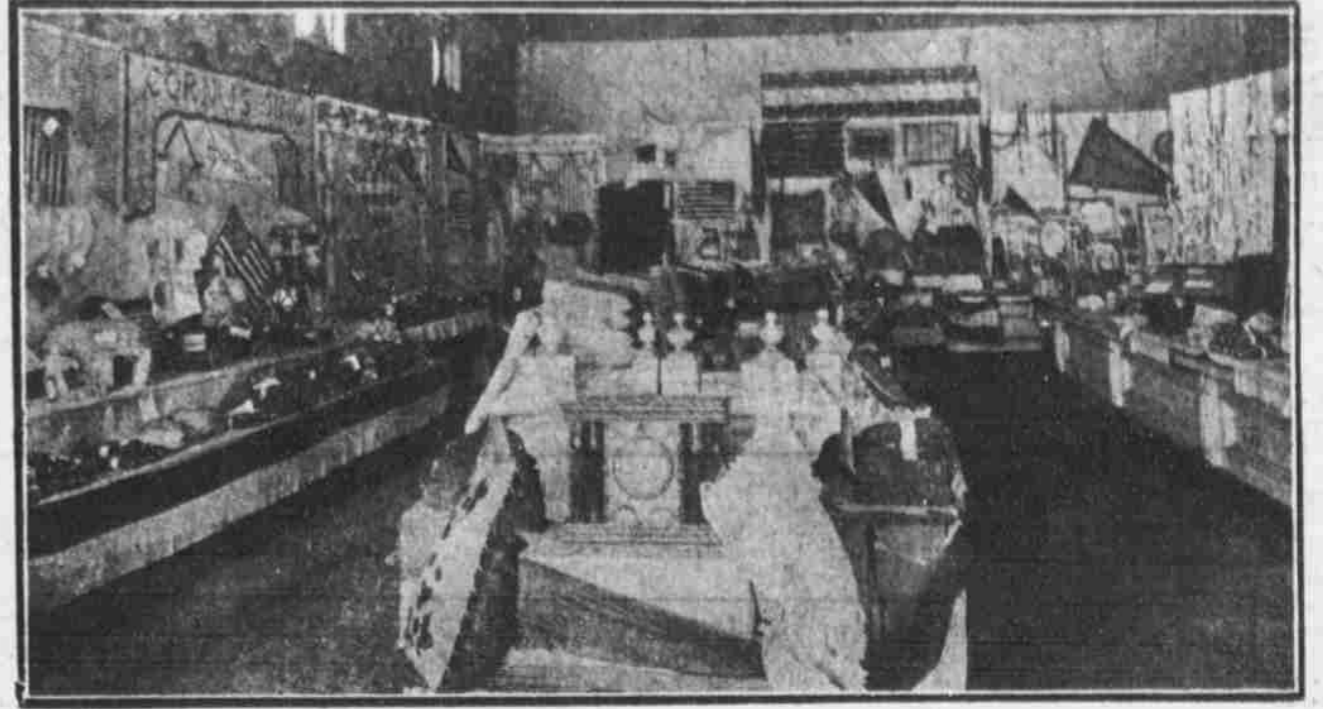


EXHIBIT OF YORK COUNTY BOYS AND GIRLS IN LOCAL CORN CONTEST.

Ends in Big State Meet.

These clubs are based upon the public school as the primary contributing influence. Contests are first held under this form of organization. The prize winners in these exhibitions are made eligible to the township contest; the winners here are carried forward to the representative organization, the county Boys' and Girls' club, whose winners are the delegates to the state exhibition, held now with the State Corn Growers' association exhibit, in January of each year and during the week of what is known in Nebraska as "The Week of Organized Agriculture."

This occasion is planned to be a big state meet of boys and girls engaged in the primary work of scientific and practical agriculture. A banquet is served, and the annual meeting embraces not only a grand time socially, but becomes one of the memorable events in the life history of every boy and girl who attends. There are usually from 2,000 to 3,000 boys and girls present on these occasions.

At the present times there are twenty-eight states that have taken hold of this or similar form of organization of junior agricultural clubs, under the auspices of

A New Feature.

In the Nebraska boys' and girls' clubs

Classes and a liberal premium list will be arranged to the county, state and national corn shows and the state fair for work done in this department. For 1910 the work planned for this department is as follows: Acre corn contest, ear to row contest, husking contest, judging contest, acre potato contest, cookery contest, sewing contest, in which all styles of textile

work will be introduced as the demands require.

At Omaha, in Douglas county, on April 27,

there was a large convention of children gathered by request of the county school superintendent representing the majority of the district schools of the county, and a club was organized with about 300 members who signified the greatest interest in taking up this plan of study of agriculture and household economics.

This organization of boys' and girls' agricultural clubs offers a splendid opportunity for the county fair, in every state where this plan of organization is being carried out, to make this a department of the fair, and arrange the classification in the premium list to cover just such features of exhibit as are provided for in the course of study, listed in the several exhibition contests of state and other exhibitions to which this class of exhibitors may be eligible. If this is a good thing, and we have every evidence that it is, and that it is going to develop into much greater proportions, then why not incorporate it into

our local agricultural fairs and boost it along when it most needs our support and assistance?

Managers of county fairs should take up this matter at once and put a little money and spirit into the boy and girl, even if it must be done at the sacrifice of the fast horse and the airship. The county fair cannot be engaged in a better work than building men and women for the higher ideals of life. Do not have it said, in this relation, of the managers of our county fairs, that the material was abundant, but the laborers were few. We have the boys and girls and they will be men and women, just as we give them opportunities. The county fair, in this work now so well begun, may be a great stimulus to activity and energy. Get an outline of the general classification for prizes from the state organizers or state school superintendent and arrange your county fair premium lists accordingly.



DOMESTIC SCIENCE SCHOOL EXHIBIT AT PAWNEE CITY.



SCHOOL GARDEN CLUB AT CRETE, NEB.

THE MAN IN THE LOWER TOWER
The Great Mystery Story
by MARY ROBERTS RINEHART
Author of "The Circular Staircase"

(Copyright, 1910, by Bobbs-Merrill Co.)
CHAPTER XXIII—Continued.

"If it is a trap," he whispered. "I have two arms to your one, and, besides, as I said before, life holds much for you. As for me, the government would merely lose an indifferent employe."

When he found I was going first he was rather hurt, but I did not wait for his protests. I swung my feet over the sill and dropped. I made a clutch at the window frame with my good hand when I found no floor under my feet, but I was too late. I dropped probably ten feet and landed with a crash that seemed to split my ear-drums. I was thoroughly shaken, but in some miraculous way the bandaged arm had escaped injury.

"For heaven's sake," Hotchkiss was calling from above, "have you broken your back?"

"No," I returned, as steadily as I could, "merely driven it up through my skull. This is a staircase. I'm coming up to open another window."

It was eerie work, but I accomplished it finally, discovering, not without mishap, a room filled with more tables than I had ever dreamed of, tables that seemed to wobble and strike me. When I had a window open, Hotchkiss crawled through, and we were at last under shelter.

My first thought was for a light. The elaborate investigation that had landed us where we were, revealed that the house was lighted by electricity, and that the plant was not in operation. By accident I stumbled across a tabouret with smoking materials, and found a half dozen matches. The first one showed us the magnitude of the room we stood in, and revealed also a brass candlestick by the open fireplace, a candlestick almost four feet high, supporting a candle of similar colossal proportions. It was Hotchkiss who discovered that it had been recently lighted. He held the match to it and peered at it over his glasses.

"Within ten minutes," he announced im-

presively, "this candle has been burning. Look at the wax! And the wick! Both soft."

"Perhaps it's the damp weather," I ventured, moving a little nearer to the circle of light. A gust of wind came in just then, and the flame turned over on its side and threatened demise. There was something almost ridiculous in the haste with which we put down the window and nursed the flicker to life.

The peculiarly ghost-like appearance of the room added to the unannounced of the situation. The furniture was swathed in white covers for the winter; even the pictures wore shrouds. And in a niche between two windows a bust on a pedestal, similarly swathed, one arm extended under its winding sheet, made a most lifelike ghost, if any ghost can be lifelike.

In the light of the candle we surveyed each other, and we were objects for mirth. Hotchkiss was taking off his sudden shooes and preparing to make himself comfortable, while I hung my muddy raincoat over the ghost in the corner. Thus habited, he presented a rakish but distinctly more comfortable appearance.

"When these people built," Hotchkiss said, surveying the huge dimensions of the room, "they must have bought a mountain and built it over it. What a room!"

It seemed to be the living room, although Hotchkiss remarked that it was much more like a dead one. It was probably fifty feet long and twenty-five feet wide. It was very high, too, with a domed ceiling, and a gallery ran around the entire room, about fifteen feet above the floor. The candle light did not penetrate beyond the dim outlines of the gallery rail, but I fancied the wall there hung with smaller pictures.

Hotchkiss had discovered a fire laid in the enormous fireplace, and in a few minutes we were steaming before a cheerful blaze. Within the radius of its light and heat, we were comfortable again. But the brightness merely emphasized the gloom of the ghostly corners. We talked in subdued tones, and I smoked a box of Russian cigarettes which I found in a

table drawer. We had decided to stay all night, there being nothing else to do. I suggested a game of double dummy bridge, but did not urge it when my companion asked me if it resembled euchre. Gradually, as the ecclesiastical candle paled in the firelight, we grew drowsy. I drew a divan into the cheerful area, and stretched myself out for sleep. Hotchkiss, who said the pain in his leg made him wakeful, sat wide-eyed by the fire, smoking a pipe.

I have no idea how much time had passed when something threw itself violently on my chest. I roused with a start and leaped to my feet, and a large Algona cat fell with a thump to the floor. The fire was still bright, and there was an odor of scorched leather through the room, from Hotchkiss' shoes. The little detective was sound asleep, his dead pipe in his fingers. The cat sat back on its haunches and wailed.

The curtain at the door into the hallway bulged slowly out into the room and fell again. The cat looked toward it and opened its mouth for another howl. I thrust at it with my foot, but it refused to move. Hotchkiss stirred uneasily, and his pipe clattered to the floor.

The cat was standing at my feet, staring behind me. Apparently it was following with its eyes an object unseen to me, that moved behind me. The tip of its tail waved threateningly, but when I wheeled I saw nothing.

I took a candle and made a circuit of the room. Behind the curtain that had moved the door was securely closed. The windows were shut and locked, and everywhere the silence was absolute. The cat followed me majestically. I stooped and stroked its head, but it persisted in its uncanny watching of the corners of the room.

When I went back to my divan, after putting a fresh log on the fire, I was reassured. I took the precaution, and smiled at myself for doing it, to put the fire tongs within reach of my hand. But the cat would not let us sleep. After a time I decided that it wanted water, and I started

in search of some, carrying the candle without the stand. I wandered through several rooms, all closed and dismantled, before I found a small lavatory opening off a billiard room. The cat lapped steadily, and I filled a glass to take back with me. The candle flickered in a sickly fashion that threatened to leave me there lost in the wanderings of the many hallways, and from somewhere there came a faint, then, with sleep gone from me, I lay back on my divan and reflected on many things: on my idiocy in coming; on Allison West, and the fact that only a week before she had been a guest in this very house; on Richey and the constraint that had come between us. From that I drifted back to Allison, and to the barrier my comparative poverty would be.

The emptiness, the stillness were oppressive. Once I heard footsteps coming, rhythmic steps that neither hurried nor dragged, and seemed to mount endless staircases without coming any closer. I realized finally that I had not quite turned off the tap, and that the lavatory, which I had circled to reach, must be quite close.

The cat lay by the fire, its nose on its folded paws, content in the warmth and companionship. I watched it idly. Now and then the green wood hissed in the fire, but the cat never batted an eye. Through an unshuttered window the light-blossoms flashed. Suddenly the cat looked up. It lifted its head and stared directly at the gallery above. Then it blinked, and stared again. I was amused. Not until it had got on its feet, eyes riveted on the balcony, tail waving at the tip, the hair on its back a bristling brush, did I glance casually over my head.

From among the shadows a face gazed down at me, a face that seemed a fitting tenant of the ghostly room below. I saw it as plainly as I might see my own face in a mirror. While I stared at it with horrified eyes, the apparition faded. The rail was there, the Bokhara rug still weaving from it, but the gallery was empty.

The cat threw back its head and wailed.

"Neither—that is, I don't know. I didn't notice anything but the eyes," I muttered. "There were looking a hole in me. You'd seen that cat you would realize my state of mind. That was a traditional graveyard yowl."

"I don't think you saw anything at all," he lied cheerfully. "You dozed off, and the rest is the natural result of a meal on a buffet car."

Nevertheless, he examined the Bokhara carefully when we went down, and when I finally went to sleep he was reading the only book in sight—"Elwell on Bridge."

The first rays of daylight were coming mistily into the room when he roused me. He had his finger on his lips, and he whispered sibilantly while I tried to draw on my distorted boots.

"I think we have him," he said triumphantly. "I've been looking around some, and I can tell you this much. Just before we came in through the window last night, another man came. Only—he did not drop, as you did. He swung over to the stair railing, and then down. The rail is scratched. He was long enough ahead of us to go into the dining room and get a decanter out of the sideboard. He poured out the liquor on the glass, and he drank there, and took the whisky into the library across the hall. Then—he broke into a desk, using a paper knife for a jimmy."

"Good lord, Hotchkiss," I exclaimed, "why, it may have been Sullivan himself. Confound your theories—his getting far from the door was up."

"It was Sullivan," Hotchkiss returned imperturbably. "And he has not gone. His boots are by the library fire."

"He probably had a dozen pairs there he could get them," I scoffed. "And while you and I sat and slept, the very man we want to get our hands on teared at us over that railing."

"Softly, softly, my friend," Hotchkiss said, as I stamped into my other shoes. "I did not say he was gone. Don't jump at conclusions. It is fatal to reasoning. As a matter of fact, he didn't relish a night on the mountains any more than we did. After he had unintentionally frightened you almost into paralysis, what would any gentleman naturally do? Go out in the storm again? Not if I know the Allice-st-by-the-fire type. He went upstairs, wailed up near the roof, locked himself in and sat by bed."

"And is he there now?"

"He is there now."

We had no weapons. I am aware that the traditional hero is always armed, and that Hotchkiss as the low comedian should have had a revolver that missed fire. As a fact, we had nothing of the sort. Hotchkiss carried the fire tongs, but my sense of humor was too strong for me; I declined the poker.

"All we want is a little peaceable conversation with him," I demurred. "We can't beat him first and converse with him afterward. And anyhow, while I can't put my finger on the place, I think your theory is weak. If he wouldn't run a hundred miles through fire and water to get away from us, then he is not the man we want."

Hotchkiss, however, was certain. He had found the room and listened outside the door to the sleeper's heavy breathing, and so we climbed past luxurious suites, revealed in the deepening daylight, past long vistas of hall and boudoir. And we were both badly winded when we got there. It was a tower room, reached by narrow stairs, and well above the roof level. Hotchkiss was glowing.

"It was partly good luck, but not all," he panted in the search last night, he would have taken alarm and fled. Now—we have him. Are you ready?"

He gave a mischievous rap on the door with the fire tongs and stood expectant. Certainly he was right; some one moved within.

"Hello! Hello there!" Hotchkiss bawled. "You might as well come out. We won't hurt you, if you'll come peacefully."

"Told him we represent the law," I prompted. "That's the customary thing, you know."

But at that moment a bullet came squarely through the door and flattened itself with a sharp pat against the wall of the tower staircase. We ducked unannouncedly, dropped back out of range, and Hotchkiss retallied with a spirited bang at the door with the tongs. This brought another bullet. It was a ridiculous situation. Under the circumstances, no doubt, we should have retired, at least until we had armed ourselves, but Hotchkiss had no mind of fighting spirit, and as for me, my blood was up.

"Break the lock," I suggested, and Hotchkiss, standing at the side, out of range, retallied for every bullet by his smashing blow with the tongs. The shots ceased after half a dozen, and the door was giving slowly. One of us on each side peered around and into the room. There was no desperado there; only a fresh-faced, trembling lipped servant, sitting on the edge of her bed, with a quiet around her shoulders and the empty revolver at her feet.

We were victorious, but no conquered army ever beat such a retreat as ours down the tower stairs and into the refuge of the living room. There, with the door closed, sprawled on the divan, I won from one spasm of mirth into another, being some at intervals, and suffering no sage again every time I saw Hotchkiss' face. He was passing the time in conversation, the tongs still in his hand, his mouth pursed with irritation. Finally he stopped in front of me and compelled my attention.

"When you have finished cackling," he said with dignity, "I wish to justify my position. Do you think the—?—young woman upstairs put a pair of number eight boots to dry in the library last night? Do you think she poured the whisky out of that decanter?"

"They have been known to do it," I put in, but his eye glanced me. "Moreover, if she had been the person who peered at you over the gallery railing last night, don't you suppose, with her—er—belligerent disposition, she could have filled you as full of lead as a window weight?"

"I do," I assented. "It wasn't Alice—by-the-fire. I grant you that. Then who was it?"

Hotchkiss felt certain that it had been Sullivan, but I was not so sure. Why would he have crawled like a thief into his own house? If he had crossed the park as seemed probable when we went, he had not made any attempt to use the knocker. I gave it up finally, and made an effort to conciliate the young woman in the tower.

We had heard no sound since our spectacular entrance into her room. I was distinctly uncomfortable as, alone this time, I climbed to the lower staircase. Reasoning from before, she would probably throw a chair at me. I stopped at the foot of the staircase and called.

"Hello up there," I said, in as debonaire a manner as I could summon. "Good morning. We went as we went?"

No reply.

"Bon jour, mademoiselle," I tried again. This time there was a movement of some sort from above, but nothing fell on me.

"I—we want to apologize for rousing you so—er—unexpectedly this morning," I went on. "The fact is, we wanted to talk to you, and you—you were hard to waken. We are travelers, lost in your mountains, and we crave a breakfast and an audience."

She came to the door then. I could feel that she was investigating the top of my head from above. "Is Mr. Sullivan with you?" she asked. It was the first word from her, and she was not sure of her voice.

"No. We are alone. If you will come down and look at us you will find us two perfectly harmless people, whose horses—er—departed without leave last night, and left us at your gate."

She relaxed somewhat then and came down a step or two. "I was afraid I had killed somebody," she said. "The housekeeper left yesterday, and the other maids went with her."

"When she saw that I was comparatively young and looked like the family boy, she was greatly relieved. She was inclined to fight with Hotchkiss, however, for some reason. She gave us a breakfast of a sort, for there was little in the house, and afterward we telephoned to the town for a vehicle. While Hotchkiss examined scratches and replaced the Bokhara rug, I engaged Jennie in conversation."

"Can you tell me," I asked, "who is managing the estate since Mrs. Curtis was killed?"

"No one," she returned shortly. "Has—any member of the family been here since the accident?"

"No, sir. There was only the two, and some think Mr. Sullivan was killed as well as his sister."

(To Be Continued.)