

# Where Boys Learn to Farm and to be Soldiers

## Unique Experiment of a Manufacturer—Based on the Theory That Agriculture Can Be Made Fascinating to City Youths if Properly Taught

THE man of this story lived on a farm as a boy. The work he did there was the best part of his education. From his contact with nature, through planting, cultivating, and harvesting, he was taught the strict connection between cause and effect—that a seed produces after its kind, that endeavor pays, that something cannot come from nothing.

With these lessons of the farm well learned, he went to a city and won notable success. His name is connected with an article of manufacture known from one end of the country to the other. When war was declared he was named on one of the national defense agricultural committees; he was already thinking how, out of his experience on the farm and in business, he might best serve his country. A new idea embodying both experiences and centering around an important third factor—boys—had hold of him. He obtained the consent of his Chairman that he might do his part by working out the idea.

Herein is narrated for the first time the cause of his undertaking, which may have an important bearing on a vital national problem. It is a whim of the man that he tell his story anonymously, as a private in the ranks, to avoid any halo of credit for himself. The work was done at the Military Farms, Marblehead, Mass., and all who have seen what was accomplished there know where the credit belongs.

"My idea," said the man, "was to interest boys in farm work, to give it the attraction of play, or rather a game—you know football is as strenuous as pitching hay—and at the same time to give military training. We are going to need more and more boys on the farms, now and after the war; it is really one of our great national problems. I read about plans to put city boys on the farms during the vacation time, as a part of the food campaign. I know something about that—the handicaps. Take the farmer's side. The boy is sent to him at the busiest season of the year. He has no time to teach the boy, and the city boy knows nothing about farm work. When set to weeding vegetables, he is likely to pull up the vegetables as well as the weeds. Unless the farmer is unusually intelligent and patient, or the boy exceptionally quick in picking up farm work, friction develops. I believe it is fair to say that the average result of the contact of the city boy with the farmer is that the boy acquires a dislike for farm life and returns to the city with an unsympathetic feeling for the country.

"This is not as it should be. A boy should naturally learn to love a farm. There is not only the advantage to him of increased physical vigor, but the discipline and the strengthening of his mind from direct contact with nature's processes are of great help to him, whether his later life be spent in the city or the country. If a boy is to see some of the real values in farm life and work he must get the right sort of an introduction. That is what I have tried to give him."

At the time the United States entered the war the manufacturer owned a large farm near Marblehead, Mass. This he selected for the place of his experiment. He called it the Military Farms. One hundred boys were enlisted for the first year's test. The average age of the recruits was 17, and they were all from families living in that part of New England. At the very outset the spirit of the enterprise was cleared of any sense of farm drudgery by the announcement that the boys were not only to be taught how to grow food for the soldiers, but also how to become soldiers themselves. Naturally, they arrived at the farm, in the

early part of last June, in a high state of enthusiasm. It was not allowed to cool.

All the practical psychology of the business man who had built up a large industry was employed in starting his plan right. The soldier side of the enterprise was introduced first, with the beautiful farm fields and pastures as a background to a military setting. Uniform and gun were ready for each boy, and an outfit of tents for the whole of them. Under the direction of Captain Harry A. Dame, a physical director who had had much experience with boys, the recruits were organized as a military company. The boys elected their own officers. Then they picked out their own camp site and were taught how to put up their tents, in which they were to live,



Military Drill in Columns of Fours.



Boys Harvesting the Cabbage Crop.

three to a tent, instead of in prosaic farmhouses.

Gradually the boys were made acquainted with the farm work. There was a corps of instructors to explain why things were done in a particular way, so that their interest grew with each day. They beheld results brought about by their own hands; the value of purpose and intelligence in setting about doing a thing dawned upon them more clearly than ever before. Every hill of corn had its own moral lesson, too. If a hill lacked the required number of grains, it might be hidden for a time, but the truth would surely come out later. Nature was "on the square"; it rewarded honest effort, but the slacker, the faker, it has unflinchingly exposed. Every day it was a lesson in character—that all through, in every way, it paid to do things well.

There was the lesson, too, of the wisdom and the right of a man's choosing what he liked to do. The boys were told to pick out the work that suited them. Some elected to cultivate crops, others to tend the animals, horses, cows, and

sheep. It was a new thing to be brought in touch with the animals and to find out things about them. The boys learned to look at dumb brutes in a different way.

"Boys," said the head dairyman, "these cows give an average of 300 quarts of milk a day, but if a rough fellow came in here and frightened them at milking time, they would give twenty-five quarts less. That shows what kind, gentle treatment means to them. Take a horse—you might think a horse would not mind rough, swearing talk. I know it to be a fact that if a man went into the stable at night and mistreated one of the horses with angry words and blows all the other horses would feel it, too, and the rest of all of them would be disturbed for the remainder of the night."

1. Farm work was taken up again and continued until 5. From 5 to 6 was the hour of drilling.

"You ought to have seen what a change that made," said the manufacturer in unfolding his plan. "The boys were naturally beginning to get tired at 5 o'clock. But what a transformation the donning of the uniforms made! It shows what an influence atmosphere is. Shoulders went back, chests expanded, and the boys marched out to the drill ground with positive snap."

Supper time was from 6 to 6:30, and from then until 7:30 there were games. Then came a half hour for singing. Under a singing master the boys learned patriotic and popular songs. After the first lessons they would often take up the songs in the field while at work. From 8 to 8:30 was devoted to what was called "stunts." A chosen leader called upon one boy after another to do something to entertain the crowd.

"There was education even in this," continued the manufacturer. "It brought the backward boy out—made him come before the crowd and contribute his share of the fun. He could face his fellows better after that—stood better on his feet. Boys have a way of disciplining the fellow who will not do his part, and the selfish or mean-tempered boy soon gets a sharp lesson. The boys find each other's good points, too. One of the most striking things brought out was the affection which the tentmates developed for each other. After watching those boys I could better understand the stories from France about a soldier risking his life to rescue a wounded companion. I have no hesitation in saying that every one of the boys, after his experience at the Military Farms, sees a deeper meaning than ever before in the word 'friend.' There is no better part of an education than that."

In pay for work done on the farm the boys were divided into three classes, A, B, and C. Grade C boys received \$4 a week; Grade B boys, \$5; Grade A boys, \$6. There was in these divisions provision for a healthy emulation. As fast as a boy showed improvement he was advanced to a higher grade. The boys were allowed, in addition, 50 cents a day each to provide their food, in soldier mess fashion. There were also prizes for excellence in particular kinds of farm cultivation. Wherever feasible, the plan was shaped to draw out initiative by the offer of special rewards, for in this enterprise the farm was not the land, but the boys. They were being cultivated to see how much could be made of them, how good a crop of men could be produced out of the 100.

"I naturally enjoyed building up my business," said the manufacturer, "but it was nothing like this—nothing like seeing the change wrought in those boys from day to day. Yes, from day to day! I didn't plan to be there all the time, but that's what resulted. I belong to I don't know how many golf clubs, but they all went by the board. The first thing I knew I was one of the boys. I joined in with them and went through with the whole thing. Say, I would go broke betting on this plan. It will work wherever it is tried. The stuff is in the boys; all that is necessary is to bring it out, and the farm is the place. I wish 400,000 of our boys could have the advantage of such farm and soldier training this Summer, and I am telling you about my plan in the hope that it will spread. I hope some of the gentleman farmers around New York will try it. I can guarantee that nothing they ever did will give them so much enjoyment. If any one is seeking a selfish return, I think the chances are that it will add ten years to his life: Let any one write to Military Farms,

Marblehead, Mass., and he will receive an answer." Before the season was at an end the boys had been instructed in every kind of farm work—preparation of the soil, planting, germination of the seed, caring for the crop, marketing, &c. There were regular meetings under instructors. It was the new kind of farming that was taught, for the manufacturer knew something of the drawbacks and the shortcomings of the kind practiced in his boyhood days. The advantage of forethought, of system, was laid before the boys. There were illustrations in the form of charts of the farm. These showed that plots of ground were set aside a long time in advance for certain crops, that provisions were made for the seed and for the scientific testing of it in the amounts required. The time of the planting and the amount of help needed were noted in the charts. The boys learned that there was no haphazard about the farm, that the crops and the work were all under a comprehensive system covering every detail.

Through the lessons there was emphasized again and again the requirement that successful farming meant the use of the best business principles—that at the bottom a farm must be seen as a money-making plant, like a factory in the city.

Problems as they arose were put right up to the boys. The early cabbage market slumped and left a large lot on hand. A meeting of the boys was called. "What are we going to do with the cabbage?" was the question put to them. "Store it," said one boy, "until the market goes up." This brought new information as to cabbage, for the expert said that, as it was early cabbage, it would not keep. "Make sauerkraut out of it, and then store it," said another boy. This the ex-

pert said could be done; it was a sound suggestion and—

"I object to the word sauerkraut," broke in another boy. "It's German."

"Let's make it and call it 'pep,'" proposed another. The suggestion was carried unanimously. Two hundred hog heads of "pep" were made; it is being marketed now.

With the boys' help there were turned out on the farm last season 1,000 bushels of beets, 100 tons of squash, 7,000 bushels of carrots, 1,000 bushels of parsnips, 100 tons of hay, 2 silos of ensilage, large crops of potatoes and various kinds of

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Military Rule Governs the Camp—Bugler Calling Assembly.

Some of the boys who were at the farm are already in the United States Army. Letters have been received from them telling how much help the farm training of last Summer has been to them.

The Military Farms will soon start on its second season with a new lot of 150 boys. There are many more applicants than places.

"It is a chance for the gentleman farmer to take up something real," said the manufacturer. "Let him crop boys this year when the war every day calls more directly to each one of us. I hope to hear from some of the gentleman farmers."