

THE GOLDEN KEY

Or "The Adventures of Ledgard."

By the Author of "What He Cost Her."

CHAPTER II.—(Continued).

"That's all very well, my friend," he said, "but kindly remember that you are young, and well, and strong. I am old, and an invalid. I need support. Don't be hard on me, Trent. Say fifty again."

"No, nor fifty hundred," Trent answered shortly. "I don't want your money. Don't be such a fool, or you'll never live to enjoy it."

Monty shuffled on to his feet, and walked aimlessly about the hut. Once or twice as he passed the place where the bottle rested he hesitated; at last he paused, his eyes lit up, he stretched out his hand stealthily. But before he could possess himself of it Trent's hand was upon his collar. "You poor fool!" he said, "leave it alone, can't you? You want to poison yourself I know. Well, you can do as you jolly well like when you are out of this—not before."

Monty's eyes flashed evil fires, but his tone remained persuasive. "Trent," he said, "be reasonable. Look at me! I ask you now whether I am not better for that last drop. I tell you that it is food and wine to me. I need it to brace me up for to-morrow. Now listen! Name your own stake! Set it up against that single glass! I am not a mean man, Trent. Shall we say one hundred and fifty?"

Trent looked at him half scornfully, half deprecatingly. "You are only wasting your breath, Monty," he said, "I couldn't touch money won in such a way, and I want to get you out of this alive. There's fever in the air all around us, and if either of us get a touch of it that drop of brandy might stand between us and death. Don't worry me like a spoilt child. Roll yourself up and get to sleep! I'll keep watch."

"I will be reasonable," Monty whined. "I will go to sleep, my friend, and worry no more when I have had just one sip of that brandy! It is the finest medicine in the world for me! It will keep the fever off. You do not want money you say! Come, is there anything in this world which I possess, which you will set against that three inches of brown liquid?"

Trent was on the point of an angry negative. Suddenly he stopped—hesitated—and said nothing. Monty's face lit up with sudden hope. "Come," he cried, "there is something I see! You're the right sort, Trent. Don't be afraid to speak out. It's yours, man, if you win it. Speak up!"

"I will stake that brandy," Trent answered, "against the picture you let fall from your pocket an hour ago."

CHAPTER III.

For a moment Monty stood as though dazed. Then the excitement which had shone in his face slowly subsided. He stood quite silent, muttering softly to himself, his eyes fixed on Trent.

"Her picture! My little girl's picture! Trent, you are joking, you're mad!"

"Am I?" Trent answered nonchalantly. "Perhaps so! Anyhow those are my terms! You can play or not as you like! I don't care."

A red spot burned in Monty's cheeks, and a sudden passion shook him. He threw himself upon Trent and would have struck him but that he was as a child in the younger man's grasp. Trent held him at a distance easily and without effort. "There's nothing for you to make a fuss about," he said gruffly. "I answered a plain question, that's all. I don't want to play at all. I should most likely lose, and you're much better without the brandy."

Monty was foaming with passion and baffled desire.

"You beast!" he cried, "you low, ill-bred cur! How dared you look at her picture! How dare you make me such an offer! Let me go, I say! Let me go!"

But Trent did not immediately relax his grasp. It was evidently not safe to let him go. His fit of anger bordered upon hysterics. Presently he grew calmer but more maudlin. Trent at last released him, and thrusting the bottle of brandy into his coat-pocket, returned to his game of Patience. Monty lay on the ground watching him with red, shifty eyes.

"Trent," he whimpered. But Trent did not answer him.

"Trent, you needn't have been so beastly rough. My arm is black and blue and I am sore all over."

But Trent remained silent. Monty crept a little nearer. He was beginning to feel a very injured person.

"Trent," he said, "I'm sorry we've had words. Perhaps I said more than I ought to have done. I did not mean to call you names. I apologise."

"Granted," Trent said tersely, bending over his game.

"You see, Trent," he went on, "you're not a family man, are you? If you were, you would understand. I've been down in the mire for years, an utter scoundrel, a poor, weak, broken-down creature. But I've always kept that picture! It's my little girl! She doesn't know I'm alive, never will know, but it's all I have to remind me of her and I couldn't part with it, could I?"

"You'd be a blackguard if you did," Trent answered curtly.

Monty's face brightened. "I was sure," he declared, "that

upon reflection you would think so. I was sure of it. I have always found you very fair, Trent, and very reasonable. Now shall we say two hundred?"

"You seem very anxious for a game," Trent remarked. "Listen, I will play you for any amount you like, my I O U against your I O U. Are you agreeable?"

Monty shook his head. "I don't want your money, Trent," he said. "You know that I want that brandy. I will leave you to name the stake I am to set up against it."

"As regards that," Trent answered shortly, "I've named the stake; I'll not consider any other."

Monty's face once more grew black with anger. "You are a beast, Trent—a bully!" he exclaimed passionately; "I'll not part with it!"

"I hope you won't," Trent answered. "I've told you what I should think of you if you did."

Monty moved a little nearer to the opening of the hut. He drew the photograph hesitatingly from his pocket, and looked at it by the moonlight. His eyes filled with maudlin tears. He raised it to his lips and kissed it.

"My little girl," he whispered. "My little daughter."

Trent had re-lit his pipe and started a fresh game of Patience. Monty, standing in the opening, began to mutter to himself.

"I am sure to win—Trent is always unlucky at cards—such a little risk, and the brandy—ah!"

He sucked in his lips for a moment with a slight gurgling sound. He looked over his shoulder, and his face grew haggard with longing. His eyes sought Trent's, but Trent was smoking stolidly and looking at the cards spread out before him, as a chess-player at his pieces.

"Such a very small risk," Monty whispered softly to himself. "I need the brandy too. I cannot sleep without it! Trent!"

Trent made no answer. He did not wish to hear. Already he had repented. He was not a man of keen susceptibility, but he was a trifle ashamed of himself. At that moment he was tempted to draw the cork, and empty the brandy out upon the ground.

"Trent! Do you hear, Trent?" He could no longer ignore the hoarse, plaintive cry. He looked unwillingly up. Monty was standing over him with white, twitching face and bloodshot eyes.

"Deal the cards," he muttered simply, and sat down.

Trent hesitated. Monty misunderstood him and slowly drew the photograph from his pocket and laid it face downwards upon the table. Trent bit his lip and frowned.

"Rather a foolish game this," he said. "Let's call it off, eh? You shall have—well, a thimbleful of the brandy and go to bed. I'll sit up, I'm not tired."

But Monty swore a very profane and a very ugly oath.

"I'll have the lot," he muttered. "Every drop; every drop! Ay, and I'll keep the picture. You see, my friend, you see; deal the cards."

Then Trent, who had more faults than most men, but who hated bad language, looked at the back of the photograph, and, shuddering, hesitated no longer. He shuffled the cards and handed them to Monty.

"Your deal," he said laconically. "Same as before I suppose?"

Monty nodded, for his tongue was hot and his mouth dry, and speech was not an easy thing. But he dealt the cards, one by one with jealous care, and when he had finished he snatched upon his own, and looked at each with sickly disappointment.

"How many?" Trent asked, holding out the pack. Monty hesitated, half made up his mind to throw away three cards, then put one upon the table. Finally, with a little whine, he laid three down with trembling fingers and snatched at the three which Trent handed him. His face lit up, a scarlet flush burned in his cheek. It was evident that the draw had improved his hand.

Trent took his own cards up, looked at them nonchalantly, and helped himself to one card. Monty could restrain himself no longer. He threw his hand upon the ground.

"Three's," he cried in fierce triumph, "three of a kind—nines."

Trent laid down his own cards calmly down.

"A full hand," he said, "kings up."

Monty gave a little gasp and then a moan. His eyes were fixed with a fascinating glare upon those five cards which Trent had so calmly laid down. Trent took up the photograph, thrust it carefully into his pocket without looking at it, and rose to his feet.

"Look here, Monty," he said, "you shall have the brandy; you've no right to it, and you're best without it by long chalks. But there, you shall have your own way."

Monty rose to his feet and balanced himself against the post.

"Never mind—about the brandy," he faltered. "Give me back the photograph."

Trent shrugged his shoulders. "Why?" he asked coolly. "Full hand beats three, don't it? It was my win and my stake."

"Then—then take that!" But the blow never touched Trent. He thrust

out his hand and held his assailant away at arm's length.

Monty burst into tears. "You don't want it," he moaned; "what's my little girl to you? You never saw her, and you never will see her in your life."

"She is nothing to me, of course," Trent answered. "A moment or so ago her picture was worth less to you than a quarter of a bottle of brandy."

"I was mad," Monty moaned. "She was my own little daughter, God help her!"

"I never heard you speak of her before," Trent remarked.

There was a moment's silence. Then Monty crept out between the posts into the soft darkness, and his voice seemed to come from a great distance.

"I have never told you about her," he said, "because she is not the sort of woman who is spoken of at all to such men as you. I am no more worthy to be her father than you are to touch the hem of her skirt. There was a time, Trent, many, many years ago, when I was proud to think that she was my daughter, my own flesh and blood. When I began to go down—it was different. Down and down and lower still! Then she ceased to be my daughter! After all it is best. I am not fit to carry her picture. You keep it Trent—you keep it—and give me the brandy."

He staggered up on to his feet and crept back into the hut. His hands were outstretched, claw-like and bony, his eyes were fierce as a wild-cat's. But Trent stood between him and the brandy bottle.

"Look here," he said, "you shall have the picture back—curse you! But listen. If I were you and had wife, or daughter, or sweetheart like this—he touched the photograph almost reverently—"why, I'd go through fire and water, but I'd keep myself decent; ain't you a silly old fool, now? We've made our piles, you can go back and take her a fortune, give her jewels and pretty dresses, and all the fal-de-lals that women love. You'll never do it if you muddle yourself up with that stuff, old 'un. Chuck the drink till we've seen this thing through at any rate!"

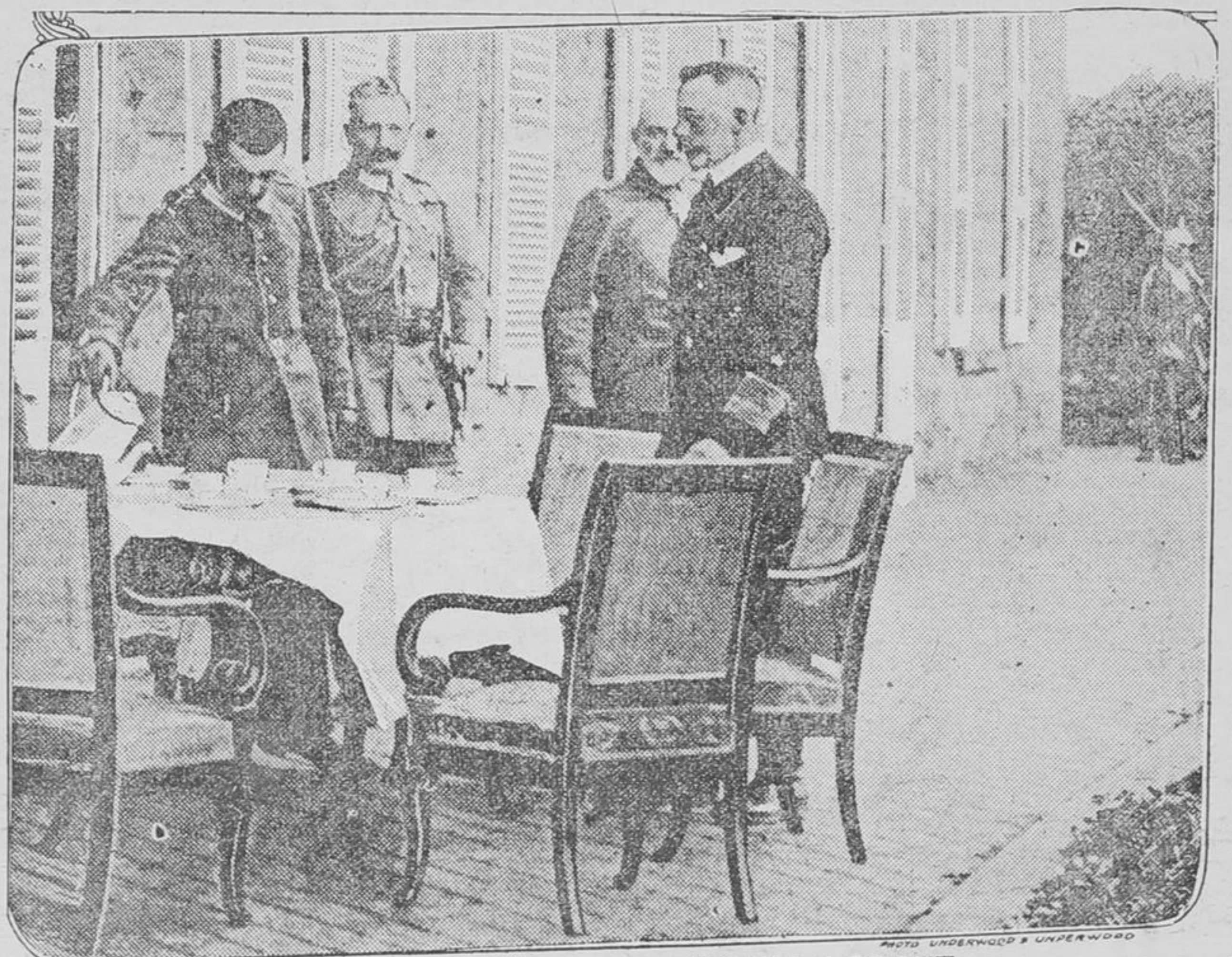
"You don't know my little girl," Monty muttered. "How should you? She'd care little for money or gew-gaws, but she'd break her heart to see her old father—come to this—broken down—worthless—a hopeless, miserable wretch. It's too late. Trent, I'll have just a glass I think. It will do me good. I have been fretting, Trent, you see how pale I am."

He staggered towards the bottle. Trent watched him, interfering no longer. With a little chuckle of content he seized upon it and, too fearful of interference from Trent to wait for a glass, raised it to his lips. There was a gurgling in his throat—a little spasm as he choked, and released his lips for a moment. Then the bottle slid from his nerveless fingers to the floor, and the liquor oozed away in a little brown stream; even Trent dropped his pack of cards and sprang up startled. For bending down under the sloping roof was a European, in linen clothes and white hat. It was the man for whom they had waited. (To be continued.)

A Test of Lunacy.

It is said that in a certain lunacy asylum one of the tests applied to find out if a patient is sufficiently recovered to be discharged is to give him a broom and put him in a room with a water-tap turned full on. If he proceeds placidly to sweep up the water without turning off the tap his standard of intelligence is not deemed to be high enough.

The Alberta and British Columbia fruit convention at Calgary adopted a resolution calling for reduction in minimum weight of express car-loads.



A GERMAN "TEA PARTY" ON THE WESTERN FRONT

In this picture the Kaiser and his brother, Prince Henry of Prussia, are seen on a visit to the headquarters of General von Heeringen, who is in command opposite Rheims. The three sat down to tea and discussed the plans of campaign.

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Poultry Alphabet.

A utility bird is rarely worth doctoring, the axe being an excellent surgical instrument to apply to sick fowls.

Balanced rations supply maximum of nourishment with minimum of waste.

Cull closely, for it does not pay to board idlers.

Do not attempt too much to accomplish thoroughly.

Every insect left to mature will decrease the profits of the flock.

F-i-l-t-h spells failure.

Good stock is the best foundation but it must be handled with common sense.

Hens are not magicians; so cannot manufacture eggs unless given the proper materials.

Indolence and poultry-breeding make a combination which would bankrupt a wealthy financier.

Just a little observation will prove that the I-know-it-alls never make successful poultrymen.

Kindness shown to fowls pays in increased egg-supply.

Lice multiply rapidly in uncleanly surroundings.

May chicks pushed to maturity, make fall layers to fill in the time when earlier hatched birds are resting.

No mixed flocks can give the satisfaction of a single breed.

One's favorite breed is usually the best with which to win success.

Pullets should be separated from cockerels as soon as sex can be distinguished.

Quickly kill the chicks which are dwarfed or crippled when hatched.

Rush young birds towards maturity if you wish large profits.

Select breeders early and dispose of all other male birds.

Try to waste no feed, either by over feeding, careless methods, or one-sided diet.

Unless you give your flock regular care, they do not pay to keep.

Very few poultrymen know so much that they can learn nothing from the experience of others.

Hens are Profitable Assets.

Possibly no farm live stock pays

as big a profit for food as do hens. Seems strange, but true, that one egg will pay for the keep of a dozen hens one day.

A hen if given a chance to forage will find a large part of her feed and during certain seasons of the year will be able to lay a goodly number of eggs without any further feed. This fact has caused the hen in a great many instances to be neglected and shift largely for herself. Of course when thus disregarded she cannot be expected to be as profitable as when given good care and attention.

The refuse from the kitchen can be profitably turned into eggs rather than given to some worthless cats and dogs. The table scraps are excellent diet for fowls. Care must be exercised in feeding refuse from the kitchen or the outcome may be fatal. If foods where large quantities of salt were used in their preparation are given to the fowls they may gorge themselves on this salty food and great loss of fowls may be encountered. One party who had salted a quantity of sweet corn found late in the spring that this corn was no longer wanted for cooking purposes and thoughtlessly threw it to the chickens. An excessive amount of it was eaten and in a few hours many of the fowl had died. In much the same way a farmer lost a fine bunch of young chickens by feeding them salted mash potatoes.

Not Seen in Daytime.

A farmer worked his harvest hands from 4 o'clock in the morning until 9 o'clock at night. A man looking for work hollered to a hand over in the big wheat field, asking him if he could get a job. He was advised to ask at the house.

"How do I get there?" the applicant asked.

"You go down this field," said the haggard laborer, "turn down the road to the barn, turn to the left and follow the lane."

"What color is the house painted?" asked the applicant, doubtfully.

"I don't know," said the harvest hand. "I ain't never seen it in daylight yet."