

# Scarecrows

By George R. Warden.

The woman who sat on the doorstep of her little house, situated in the midst of about three acres of land, was crippled with rheumatism, and though she had a white rag tied to the end of a crutch and was waving it at half a dozen crows sitting on the fence they seemed to regard her with contempt. Presently they dropped down into the field and began to scratch. The rag was waved and the woman shouted, and a voice at her feet asked:

"Is anything wrong with you?"

A girl of eighteen had left the big farmhouse on the hill, half a mile away for a walk, and as she neared the cottage the shouts of the woman and the cawing of the crows had attracted her attention.

"Yes, there's lots wrong," replied the woman. "The crows are scratching up the sweet corn I planted last week."

The girl entered the gate and picked up a stick and advanced upon the crows with a "S-h-o-o!" and they took to flight. Then she sat down beside the woman.

"I'm from Jasper's," said the girl. "Mrs. Jasper is my sister, and I am there on a visit. I passed here yesterday and was wondering who lived here."

"It's me that has lived here all alone for the last five years, child. I'm a widow. The rheumatism came on me two years ago and now I can hardly walk. The crows have scratched up most all I've planted this spring. I'm waiting for Farmer Johnson to come along and set up a scarecrow for me."

"But I can help you. You stuff old clothes with straw and make them look like a man."

"Bless you, dear; it will be the saving of my corn. You'll find trousers and coat and hat hanging up in the shed. I got them out the other day."

An hour later the "scarecrow" was set up on the corn ground, and there were dismal lamentations from the crows as they sought other fields. They had bluffed and robbed a poor rheumatic widow, but when it came to a man with his hat cocked on one ear and a stick in his hands to represent a gun they realized that times had changed.

That was May Kelly's first visit to the widow Henstead, but after that scarcely a day passed that she did not run in with a gift of some sort and to see that the scarecrow was attending to business. One afternoon as the couple sat on the step, and the girl was telling the woman of her home in the city, a tramp came along the road. He may not have been hungry enough for food, but he did want a new outfit of clothing. He caught sight of the scarecrow and his hopes rose. He was so crooked to be fooled with a straw-stuffed man. He seized the woman, but he climbed the fence and shouldered the "scare" and walked away with it.

"Let that alone! You shan't take it!" called the girl.

"Beg pardon, ladies," replied the tramp, with a bow and a scrape, "but you do not understand the situation. I am invited to attend a wedding in the city to-morrow, and I've got to have a suit to wear. This isn't as good as one as I could wish for, but I'll have to make it do."

"It's stealing and you can be arrested," threatened the girl.

"And if I'm to be arrested I must have a suit that is decent to go before the judge. I ain't bragging, but my looks right this minute, but if you see me half an hour later you'll take me for a broker going to business."

"And now the crows!" sighed the widow as the tramp walked off.

"And the 'scare' was such a beautiful object!" added the girl. "When we sat here looking at him I almost felt that he could talk to us. You've got another old hat and a ragged blanket in the shed, but I'll have to bring something from the house."

The crow was sighted. The absence of the "scare" had been noticed. The one crow became five in twenty. They set on the fence and held a caucus. They determined to destroy the widow of her last grain of corn. Miss May threw sticks and stones, but, of course, they laughed at her. All crows laugh when they see a girl throwing. The widow found a rag and waved it to save the country, but the crows winked at it. Ragtime had passed with them. They were ready to drop to earth and begin scratching when the girl cried out:

"Don't show any more. I'll scare the life out of them!"

In another minute she had the old hat on and the ragged quilt around her and was running across the field. With a grand chorus of frightened caws the crows rose up and sailed away and then began circling round to see if it was the real thing or only a bluff. To convince them, the girl took a pose, and she was such a comical object that the widow forgot all her sorrows in laughter. The new "scare" had been in position about ten minutes when a young man with a gun on his shoulder came out of the woods beyond the field and headed for the house. The "scare's" back was toward him. The widow saw, but dared not call out.

"I'll-I'll-I'll George, I'll do it! Only serve me right. I'll stand for an hour by the watch, and then I shall expect to receive your forgiveness."

"I don't quite mean what I said," stammered Miss May as she saw that he was about to take her at her word.

"But I'm willing—quite willing. I will excuse you for an hour, please."

Miss May went to the house and sat on the doorstep with the widow. She wanted to be angry, but the humor of the situation prevented. She wanted to think the young man very impertinent, but, really, he was a fine looking fellow and a gentleman, and he was out there playing scarecrow under her eyes. The widow laughed and the girl giggled, and the "scare's" punishment was cut 15 minutes short by a hand being waved to him. As he came to the steps an informal introduction took place. Then Mr. Mortimer, with his superior ingenuity, managed to rig up an object warranted to keep all crows 40 rods from a cornfield or no pay.

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"Here you—what do you want?" called the widow from the doorway.

The young man wanted to investigate that scarecrow. He walked right up to the object and laid a hand on it. The brown eyes of the object looked straight into his.

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"Well, you've done it!" replied the girl as she flung away hat and quilt and faced him with burning cheeks.

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"Then why didn't you go along and mind your business? I didn't ask you to come."

"Of course not, and I'm so sorry. Really, now, but I'll go at once."

"No, you won't! I was playing scarecrow here to keep the birds from the corn. You had to come along and discover me and humiliate me. Now play scarecrow yourself for an hour! It's for the poor widow there in the door."

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Miss May went to the house and sat on the doorstep with the widow. She wanted to be angry, but the humor of the situation prevented. She wanted to think the young man very impertinent, but, really, he was a fine looking fellow and a gentleman, and he was out there playing scarecrow under her eyes. The widow laughed and the girl giggled, and the "scare's" punishment was cut 15 minutes short by a hand being waved to him. As he came to the steps an informal introduction took place. Then Mr. Mortimer, with his superior ingenuity, managed to rig up an object warranted to keep all crows 40 rods from a cornfield or no pay.

The young man would have passed the object forty feet to his left, but after a glance at it his curiosity was excited. He had seen scarecrows before, but never one like that. It seemed to wave now and then, instead of being tied fast to a stake. Presently, Miss May heard the footsteps of a man.

"Here you—what do you want?" called the widow from the doorway.

The young man wanted to investigate that scarecrow. He walked right up to the object and laid a hand on it. The brown eyes of the object looked straight into his.

"By George!" gasped the young man as he fell back.

"Well, you've done it!" replied the girl as she flung away hat and quilt and faced him with burning cheeks.

"A thousand pardons. I had no idea I was talking to a scarecrow."

"No idea?"

"Then why didn't you go along and mind your business? I didn't ask you to come."

"Of course not, and I'm so sorry. Really, now, but I'll go at once."

"No, you won't! I was playing scarecrow here to keep the birds from the corn. You had to come along and discover me and humiliate me. Now play scarecrow yourself for an hour! It's for the poor widow there in the door."

"I'll-I'll-I'll George, I'll do it! Only serve me right. I'll stand for an hour by the watch, and then I shall expect to receive your forgiveness."

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## PROBLEM FOR UNEMPLOYED.

Poor Law Administration is a Failure.

A royal commission appointed by the Government of Great Britain in 1905 to study the working of the poor laws and other forms of public relief, finds that the present system of poor law administration is a failure. More tragic than the bankruptcy of a system is the unchecked growth of the evil with which that system was intended to cope. There were 21,000 more paupers in the years 1896-1906 than there were in 1888-96, and 7,000 more than in 1884-88. If we compare the period 1896-1906 with the period 1871-80, we find a decrease of 3.9 per cent. in the total number of paupers, but that the commission found out, is because there has been a decrease of eighteen per cent. in the number of dependent children, and two per cent. in the number of women. Adult male paupers have increased by no less than eighteen per cent. In other words, the old charge that almshouses were filled as a result of reckless breeding among the very poor has lost most of its force. The ranks of English destitution are now recruited from among grown-up men and women. The increase in pauperism, says the report, is greater during the working years of life than among the very old or very young. For the whole of England and Wales the number of able-bodied persons in receipt of relief in 1896-1906 showed an increase of probably more than thirty-five per cent.

The commission recognizes how vastly complicated is the problem with which it attempts to deal, yet it holds that much can be done. It suggests numerous preventive rather than strictly remedial, designed not so much for the distressed unemployed as for the prevention of their becoming so. The commission urges the greater need of technical and special education and a higher school age to keep boys from being sent to blind alleys. It has great stress on the usefulness of public labor exchanges or employment bureaus, in increasing the mobility of labor. Germany, it is pointed out, has 700 such bureaus, and they find work for 150,000 persons every month. It urges upon employers the duty of regulating their season of production so as to reduce to a minimum the large reserve of unemployed labor which modern industry demands, and it discusses the possibilities of insurance against unemployment, of labor colonies and of emigration.

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