

“HE WANTED AN ORDER.”

IT has been said, and with truth, that agriculture is behind the age. The farmer is slow to go ahead. He moves, and that is all ; but his movement is that of a ship that, with the anchor “awash,” has just got under way, and, with sheets trimmed, commences to spring and heel to the breeze. “Where ignorance is bliss ’tis folly to be wise” was a good enough excuse for him in the days of Gray ; but now in the days of Tennyson, “Knowledge comes, but wisdom lingers,” is a general accusation applicable to him and his class. Forced, possibly, he has been, out of his rut ; rents have been raised, and labour has increased in price ; ignorance has ceased to be bliss, and, therefore, folly no longer wisdom. Possibly what the poets have more to complain of is the innovation of agriculturists, for the stern-thinking political economist, sees no beauty in anything unconnected with a balance-sheet. There are no “sickles” now in the field ; even the scythe has gone ; the song of the reaper has been silenced by the monotonous “click” of the horse-mower, and the ploughboy’s whistle is completely drowned by the wild scream from the heavy engine which drags the ponderous Cultivator—or, perchance, Steam Digger—from headland to headland. Nor has any poet yet arisen bold enough to raise rhymes for “cultivators” and “grubbers” and “tedders” and “smashers.”

New characters have come upon the scene. The commercial “bagmen” are possibly of a comparatively modern growth ; yet they are to be found in very large numbers generally in the neighbourhood of agricultural shows. Their samples are big, and range in weight from steam ploughs of several tons to light hayforks—“so light,” they will tell you, “that a child can handle them.” Generally trained mechanics are on the ground a few days previous to the exhibition, busily engaged in superintending the assistants sent on from the workshops to fit up the machines.

Then comes the work of disposal! There is possibly no more difficult fish to hook than a farmer, and no bigger flat when once landed. Like the salmon, he is invariably caught by something that *post mortem* examinations prove to be quite foreign to his maw. How many useless bone-bruizers, guano-crushers, oilcake nutters, more intended for sale than for work—he collects at his farm is only revealed at sales by auction, when the individual who has to compile the catalogue rummages the dark corners of the tool-house or the cart-shed. Perhaps they might have worked well enough if their purchasers had enough of mechanical knowledge to keep them oiled and in good order; but, like the scythe that was too frequently lost in the foliage of the hedge in which it was hidden at the close of the harvest, to be discovered next summer by some bird-nesting urchin, the reaper is allowed to stand in the open till the knives are literally fastened by the rust between the finger-bars. As to co-operating to buy implements, and save percentage, that could not be expected of a class who can rarely keep united for a fortnight as to the uniform price of the field-labourer's wages. Possibly it is to this uncommercial way of doing things that farming does not pay, as the system in which trade has to be pushed in machines and manures all increase the cost to the consumer. But to our story.

It was at "Merry Carlisle" in the last week of the "Royal" Show. On the Saturday previous—

I stood and gazed from Dalswinton wood,
To Criffel's green mountains, and Solway flood
Was quiet and joyous.

But the clouds gathered on the Cockermouth hills on Monday night, and on Tuesday the Eden was in flood, as in the days when Red Rowan and Wat of Harden, and the hardy border reivers of the North forded the brown flood with the dalesmen of Cumberland in pursuit. The old battles had been fought out in a more peaceful way in the show-rings of the Black Galloways and the fringe-legged Clydesdales; and there was leisure to stroll over the wooden-bridge, and up the long avenues of implements, at every stand in which the keen-eyed agent was on the outlook for a customer. There was none keener than Joe Reljambe, about the oldest and most knowing man in the trade. Full of stories, he could tell you most exciting romances of the

days when he had the audacity to introduce the reaping machine into Ireland, and recount them in a style which implied that he would not tell one a lie. He was generally in his element recording his reception at the station on his march to the field, escorted by the police, and the never-to-be-forgotten crop of pokers which stood erect on the roadside, all ready to be thrown at him. Wonderful romances, generally finishing up with the production of a note-book and the query—"Shall I book you one, sir?"

Joe was busy selling some chaff-cutters, when a genteel dandified young fellow, beautifully attired in what may be classed as country gentleman's undress, made his appearance.

"None of your clodhoppers," said Joe to himself; "a real Cumberland squire, and no mistake. Now" [to his friends], "excuse me, gentlemen, for a minute." ("I can book a good thing in a new country, *certain*," said Joe to himself again.)

"First-rate article for a nobleman's home-farm," said he, at once making certain of the grade of his customer, who was busily engaged in balancing himself on a sack-weighing machine. "Sold seventeen since we came into the yard, and have telegraphed for a dozen more. Best thing in the show, indeed."

"Capital machine," said the interested individual; "glad you have been so successful; but what I wanted to see you about was——"

"A reaper!" said Joe, interrupting him. "Well, it's singular you should have struck on our stand. Somebody told you, I suppose, about our winning that big prize last week. Big thing that—beat Wood's and Brown's, and the new American never showed up as soon as they knew we were going. You see, our new short connecting-rod, working as it does, direct from the driving-wheel, gives us a great advantage."

"I see," said the swell young man; "just so. But you make a slight mistake. I wanted——"

"One of our new patent double-roller two-speed self-feeding chaff-cutters? Well, there is the neighbour of the one we sold to Lord Blankacre this afternoon. Best machine in the market; goes itself almost, if well oiled."

"Just so; I quite understand," said the new comer, languidly; "but——"

"Come along into our place here," said Joe, who had made dead certain that he had caught a real live nobleman, and no

mistake. "It's very damp weather, and we'll better have a little of something to keep out the cold."

Entering those nice patent little portable shebeens now so common in show-yards, Joe bustled through amongst the lot of "common farmers" he had just left drinking plain whiskey and water. Ah, how many have wakened up in the morning, who have been so treated, with a headache and an account for a new machine they did not want! Joe, however, called to the barman behind the little slit for a bottle of champagne.

"I rather think, somehow, I may be taking up your time," said the stranger.

"How modest these well-bred fellows are, after all!" thought the implement agent. "No doubt about it—real Eton, Harrow, and Oxford mixture," he said to himself. "A young one, new into the estates; a fancy for shorthorns. Wants a new bolter mill, a couple of reapers, and no end of other things. Clean off half the stand, he will."

"Oh, no; not at all," he said. "Dear me, no!"

"Well, sir?" said "the Oxford Mixture," producing his card.

"Yes, sir!" said the sanguine introducer-of-reapers-into-Ireland, getting out his note-book.

"I merely wished to recommend to your firm our new patent lubricating oil, which is used——"

"IN ALL THE LARGEST FACTORIES IN THE WORLD," said Joe, quietly, with a sigh, rising, and moving, with the card in his finger, to the door, outside of which, from the deepest mud-pool, a young man, genteel-looking in appearance, was seen to rise the next minute, with additions to his costume he had not before he plumbed the depths of the pond.

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Joe Reljambe was too wise to say much about his customer of the afternoon: but the matter somehow got wind, and when they sat down to dinner in the "Harp and Elephant," little Charlie Hopkins, the inventor of the new patent clod-crusher, as he tucked his handkerchief up to his chin, and commenced to mix a salad, asked—

"If Mr. Reljambe would be kind enough to *pass the oil!*"

And big Jamie Harkins, of Bedford, who represented the

well-known sacker and bagger makers, Jenkins and Robinson, smilingly suggested that Mr. Reljambe was made on the "*self-lubricating principle*."

"Now what did he want, Joe—a rake, or a reaper?" said the Patent Horse Medicine-Chest man, who was always very serious, even when chaffing.

"*He wanted an order*, of course," said Bobby Naylor, the Baby Plough Engine maker, at the bottom of the table.

"And I gave him one," said Joe; "I GAVE HIM THE ORDER OF THE BATH."

