

"NEL," The FARMER BOY A Possible Result of a Lad's Industry and Foresight.

By GEO. E. FOSTER.

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CHAPTER VI In Which Ned Prepares for His Next Year's Crop.

"When are you going to begin feeding your corn fodder to the cows," asked Ned of his father one day, after he had moved his potatoes from the lot.

"Right away," replied Mr. Jackson. "Where are you going to feed it out?" queried Ned.

"I shall throw it into the pasture, so that the cows can eat it on their way home at night," said Mr. Jackson, looking quizzically at Ned and wondering what new scheme he was developing in his mind.

"Was you intending that I should cut it?" said Ned.

"I was not thinking of it," replied his father.

"I would like to make a bargain with you," continued Ned. "What can it be?" said Mr. Jackson. "If you will let me have the feeding place I will cut the fodder and spread it up there. It is only a little farther away," replied Ned.

"I do not see what you want to do that for," said Mr. Jackson. "But if you will tell me why I do not mind letting you do it."

"Well, father, you have given me the use of the land for several years. This year you had it properly fertilized and in order to raise as good crops next year, I must have a fertilizer."

"That is so," replied Mr. Jackson, but what has that to do with feeding cattle on your lot?"

"Last year, father, I noticed that when the feed was very short in the pastures and you began to feed the cattle with fodder, that the cows most always came to the feeding place a little after noon, and did not go away again; they were anxious for the evening feed, and this being the case, I thought I might get fertilizer enough to keep my land in good condition for another year."

"In other words, I suppose you are going to make a compost heap?" said Mr. Jackson, and he sat down and laughed heartily at Ned's new idea.

"One day not long after this, Ned was at a neighbor's house not far off. The interior of the building was being remodeled, and a large quantity of old mortar was being removed from the walls.

"I wish the pecky stuff was out of the house," said the owner. "I must have my man get it away at once, and dump it in the swamp."

"If you please, sir," said Ned, "if you will give it to me I will take it away for nothing. I would like it for my compost heap."

"All right," said the man, "get it away as fast as you can, and it is yours, and welcome."

For several days Ned was more or less busy with his handcart drawing away this debris. Day by day the little field was cleared after the cattle feeding, and all the corn butts left were carefully raked up and covered in the compost heap.

"What makes you spend so much time at the end of the sink drain, Ned," said his father, as he saw him standing there one morning, apparently lost in deep thought.

"I was thinking, father, that here are several loads of good fertilizer, that is no use to any one, and in its present condition, is not very healthy to have around. I have been digging down, and I find the soil is saturated with it at at least three feet deep, for quite a distance. Mother often complains of the odor of it in warm days. I have been thinking, father, that I would dig out several loads of this for my compost heap and replace it with clean soil from my land or from some other place. Should you care?"

"Not in the least, my son, I have had no time to do that, but it is an excellent idea, and if you care to take the trouble it will be a good addition to your compost heap."

"So, for a number of days Ned spent his spare time in digging out the rich soil, and replacing it with clean, dry material. He asked his father for a barrel, which was idle in the shed, and buried it at the end of the drain.

"What is that for," said his mother, who had come out to express her gratification that the sink drain nuisance had been so effectively abated.

"Why, mother," said Ned, "you see I have just abated a nuisance, and I intend to keep it abated. I have clean soil here now, and I am going to catch in this barrel the contents of the drain, and as it accumulates, shall take it in its liquid state to my compost heap. It makes an admirable fertilizer for squashes, and I expect to raise squashes on my lot next year."

"Shall you raise no potatoes, Ned," said Mrs. Jackson in surprise.

"I shall raise some, perhaps, but I read that the crops should be rotated; that one kind of crop raised on land will soon run out. Now, I find that my one row of squashes netted me as much as my whole field of potatoes, and I did not spend so much time on them either. I think the soil there is well adapted to squashes, consequently I shall try them next year. I shall have enough compost for squash hills, though there would not be enough to do a potato crop justice."

"What a planner you are getting to be, Ned," replied Mr. Jackson, "but I noticed that you are making a bed of one corner of your field and appear to be trying to have the land extra well fertilized and pulverized. What are you going to have there next spring?"

"I am going to plant potatoes, Ned, when I see from the potato crop that I can get a good crop."

to Ned's list that fall. His father made a general trimming of his apple orchard, and after the wood was trimmed out there remained quite a lot of fine brush. Mr. Jackson made a remark in Ned's hearing that he guessed that he would have it raked up and burned, and then it was that Ned asked permission to have it burned in his lot. "What for," said his father.

"I have read in the agricultural books," replied Ned, "that ashes are numbered among the best fertilizers."

CHAPTER VII In Which Ned Receives a Great Surprise.

The following winter Ned attended school in the village, and made excellent progress. He was a constant patron of the village library, the works on agriculture being his special selections.

Early in the season, several of the farmers of the town decided to establish the Farmers' Club, and were to meet weekly for debate, and to discuss matters pertaining to agriculture.

When Ned heard of the revival of the Farmers' Club he was much interested and decided that if possible he would be a regular attendant.

When the night for organization came, Ned was early on hand, and was loudly spoken to by the elders present. His farming speculation of the preceding summer had been frequently spoken of by farmers, and they were interested in the lad's enthusiasm and besides this the landlord of the hotel, who had been telling of his speculation to Ned early in the spring.

At eight o'clock the meeting was called to order by the former president, Col. Hooper, who was re-elected president by acclamation.

John Jared Sharp, the former secretary of the society, was next nominated, and the nomination was duly seconded.

Mr. Sharp arose and said: "Gentlemen, for six consecutive winters I have held the position of secretary of our Farmers' Club. I am getting along in years, and I feel like resting on my laurels thus far obtained. My hand is getting clumsy and my eyes are getting dim, and I would like to resign in favor of some younger and more energetic farmer. I have anticipated this re-nomination, and having received it, I claim the right of naming my successor, in looking over the young and progressive farmers of our town, I have at last thought of one, who during his brief farming life has shown most wonderful penetration into Nature's secrets, and has had remarkable success in his labors. I have, I think, found the growing man of our farming community, and one who will do us honor if raised into the honorable board of officers of our Farmers' Club, and, therefore, gentlemen, I positively decline serving you in the capacity of secretary of our club for the ensuing year, and take pleasure in presenting for your consideration the name of our young farmer, Ned Jackson, Esq."

As Hon. Jared Sharp sat down, there was a general clapping of hands, while Ned sat with a crimson face and a dazed look. Before the cheers died away, Prof. Hunt of the village school, who was himself a member of the club, arose and seconded the motion, and as he did so, declared that he had been Ned's teacher for the past two years, and that while he did not know so much of Ned Jackson's farming abilities, perhaps, as did Hon. Jared Sharp, yet he would be pleased to testify that his work in school was such as would warrant his assuming the position for which he had been nominated, and whose nomination he now so gladly seconded.

When Prof. Hunt sat down there was another round of applause and Ned's face was more crimson than ever.

The President, Col. Hooper, then said: "Gentlemen—it has been moved and seconded that our young farmer, Mr. Ned Jackson, become our secretary for the coming year. If this be your mind, you will please say 'I'."

A roar of "I's" came from all parts of the room.

"Contrary minded," called Col. Hooper.

There was a dead silence.

"It is a unanimous vote," said the president. "The newly elected secretary will please take his seat, and at once assume his duties."

The awe-struck, surprised Ned did not move. His astonishment was beyond expression.

"And now, Mr. President," said the retiring secretary, "if it is not out of order, I would like to see a committee to escort our new secretary, Mr. Ned Jackson, to his seat."

Permission is given there being no objection raised, said the president.

The Hon. Jared Sharp then left his seat and went to where the bustling Ned sat. He drew Ned's arm in his own and led him to his seat beside the president, and then introduced him to the club as the new secretary, when there was another round of applause.

The other officers were quickly chosen, and the remaining business transacted, when the debates began and the exercises for the "good of the club" followed. All during the evening Ned sat like one in a dream, and we fear had little idea of what was said, yet he heard enough to make a good record of the business of the evening.

When the session closed, a groody number of people came up and congratulated the young secretary on his position. Even the retiring secretary again came and complimented Ned on being his successor, and while he was speaking his daughter, Nellie, a bright faced girl of fifteen years, stood beside him. Mr. Sharp noticed her and said: "By the way, Nellie, I wish to introduce to you your father's successor; this is Mr. Ned Jackson, whom Uncle Jones has so often spoken of at our house."

Ned had never spoken with Nellie before. He had never supposed that the daughter of Hon. Jared Sharp would care to speak to him, and his face grew even more crimson than it was where her father two hours before escorted him to the secretary's chair.

The crowd dispersed at last, and Ned, having received his instructions from the President concerning the call for the next meeting and also suggestions about keeping the records, left hurriedly for home.

As he went out of the door Wilkie jostled against him, and scowled angrily; why, Ned could not guess. In fact he did not stop to think, so anxious was he to get home to tell his mother of his success.

Mr. and Mrs. Jackson were both up waiting for him, and he burst into the house with a rush, his face glowing with excitement, and entirely out of breath.

"What is the matter?" exclaimed Mrs. Jackson with a mother's alarm at the unusual excitement and haste that her son exhibited.

"Don't you think mother?" he gasped, but he could say no more until he caught his breath.

"What all you, my child?" again said Mrs. Jackson.

"I am secretary of the big Farmers' Club in place of Hon. Jared Sharp, resigned—and—and after the meeting he introduced me to his daughter, Nellie."

The surprise of Mr. and Mrs. Jackson was great as Ned's at this home bestowed on their son. The mother's heart gave a bound of pride, as he told how he was escorted to the chair of the complimentary words spoken of him by Mr. Sharp and Prof. Hunt. But when she thought of Ned's announcement of his appointment as secretary and introduction to Nellie, all in the same breath she had a peculiar smile on her face that she did not let Ned see.

CHAPTER VIII In Which Wilkie Speaks His Mind.

"You seem to be putting on a good deal of style lately," said Wilkie, in a sulky tone, as he met him on the street next day.

"I do not know what you mean," replied Ned. "I was not aware of assuming any airs."

"You wasn't aware of it, eh?" said Wilkie sullenly. "Well, the fellow know it if you don't."

"How so, Wilkie? You do not appear as jolly as usual, what is the matter?"

"I do not like to see a fellow putting himself where he don't belong," replied Wilkie. "Just because you raised a few potatoes last summer, you now think you own the town."

"You talk foolishly, Wilkie."

"Perhaps I do," said Wilkie, "but have an idea of a fellow who hanging around people and meetings just to coax up people to give him an office."

"But I have done no such thing," replied Ned.

"Well, I say you have," started Wilkie. "Did you not go to the Farmer meeting only just to make yourself conspicuous, and hung round Col. Hooper and Hon. Mr. Sharp just to get them to get you in secretary?"

"I say you did. You are a schemer, but you are getting on too fast."

"But I did nothing of the kind, Wilkie. I never dreamed of being elected to any office. I went because I was interested in farm work, and I thought I could learn something. I was much surprised that any one took any notice of me, you do me injustice, Wilkie."

"Oh, you do, as if I cannot see what you have been around old Hunt so much for of late, growled Wilkie. "I think it is only a sneak that goes fawning about a teacher, just to get favors. I saw through it last night when he seconded your nomination."

"I have only hung around Prof. Hunt, as you call it, to talk over my lessons and to gain information. He appears very willing to help any one who tries to do," replied Ned. "I think he would be equally willing to help you or any of the boys, if he saw them actually trying."

"I saw you speaking to Nellie Sharp after the meeting last night," said Wilkie. "I call that putting on airs. I'll bet a dollar you never spoke to her before last night. It beats all how much cheek you put on after getting in a new way. One would suppose you are an end everybody."

"Why, Wilkie, exclaimed Ned, "you appear to be determined to be cross and unreasonable to-day. I was not bold enough to speak to Nellie without introduction. I never sought introduction, either. Her father gave it to me, and of course I did not turn my back or resent it, nor was I rude to her."

"It is not likely that she would have been introduced to you there, by her father, if you had not been putting yourself forward," replied Wilkie.

"If you keep on, Wilkie, I shall begin to think you are jealous," said Ned.

"Well, I am getting tired of hearing folks talk of your being too all-fired smart, just because you happened to raise a few potatoes this year," growled Wilkie. "Once you used to play with the boys, and now for a year you have been trying to get into places beyond your station."

"I have been trying to make a man of myself," replied Ned, "and if, by faithfulness in my daily task, by hard study, and diligence, have attained the position you claim I have above you, who have spent your time in play and lounging around town, I think I shall take no back tracks. I will press forward. My summer's work appears to be bearing fruit. I suppose it is unusual for a boy to be elected secretary of a Farmers' Club. I suppose they thought me fitted for the position or I should not have been so unanimously elected; nor do I think it right for you to charge Mr. Hunt of favoritism because he spoke kindly of me, when I was nominated. In fact, Wilkie, I feel my own littleness so much beside those older and more experienced and learned than I am, that I should feel absurd to put on style or airs as you call it."

"Well, you have got on mighty fast, I think, for the past year," continued Wilkie, "and of course it is natural to feel big after receiving so much attention."

"I feel pleased, Wilkie, but not big. I have done no more the past year than any boy could do if he was similarly placed, and worked as hard as I did. I denied myself many fine times with the boys—it was a great cross to me sometimes to see you all going off for a fishing excursion, or to a game of football, but I am glad I did deny myself now. If you had spent the same time and energy that I did, I presume you might have won even greater honors yourself. You once ranked higher in the classes than I."

"Yes, it is the same old story, 'if I would be as smart as Ned, I must follow his example, that is what they all say and I am tired of hearing it,' and Wilkie turned away with an exco-

dingly ugly expression on his face.

The meetings of the Farmers' Club were well attended during the winter, by both males and females, old and young. It was the leading feature in the amusements of that town. Besides the farming interests discussed, under the direction of Prof. Hunt, there was also a fine literary entertainment provided, usually by the scholars of the village school. Ned proved an excellent secretary and very satisfactorily performed his duties. He was naturally of a retiring disposition, and he did not make any great effort to make himself conspicuous. Nellie frequently smiled pleasantly at him as she passed by the desk on her way out, and those smiles always filled him with delight. He seldom, however, spoke to her during the winter, but Wilkie appeared to be her satellite. Ned saw them frequently talking together, often he wished he might exchange places with Wilkie, that he might sit down in the hall beside Nellie, and that Wilkie might be up there looking on. But if he was jealous, he never showed it.

One of the propositions made during the meetings of the Farmers' Club, was to hold a fair during the next autumn, and a committee was appointed to arrange the premium list. When it was issued, Ned saw upon it the announcement, "5¢ for fine display of squashes."

"That five it to be mine," he said to himself, and it proved as he predicted, as will be seen further on.

CHAPTER IX Ned's Hen Speculation.

"My pecky hens all want to sit and I can't stop their wanting to. Here are no less than ten of them all on their nests. I believe I will kill them."

The speaker was a neighbor who was closing up his hen house for the night, and in an exasperated tone was telling Ned, who happened to be by the position in which he had found things.

"I found to sit, are they?" responded Ned.

"I guess you would think so if you had pulled 'em off the nests as many times as I have the last week. It appears to me as if the old possessed had got into 'em, and all nature can't prevent," responded the farmer.

"Why don't you let them sit then?"

"Do not wish the bother of chickens," responded the farmer.

"Will you sell those hens?" queried Ned.

"Yes, and be glad to get rid of the pecky critters."

"What will you take for them—for the ten I mean?" said Ned.

"Oh, I will take fifty cents each to kill them they would bring more than that," replied the farmer.

"But you do not want the bother of killing them, besides sitting hens are seldom fat. You have ten hens that you say are a nuisance to you. Fifty cents for a nuisance is too much. Now if you wish to get rid of them all, I'll take ten of your hands at thirty-five cents each, \$3.50 cash, and come and get them."

"They are worth more than that, but I am a mind to let you have them," he said after thinking a moment. "To tell the truth, they are not very fat, and they are making me a lot of trouble now. Yes, you may have them."

"I will come for them to-night, then," said Ned, and he went home to ask his father for the use of an empty barn that stood a little ways from the shop.

"What do you want of that?" said his father.

"Well, the building appears to be useless and there has been nothing in it to speak of, for several years, and I thought I would set a few hens in it this spring, and get a few chickens," replied Ned.

"Well, that would not be a bad idea, I think Ned. Yes, you may use the old shop for that purpose and welcome. Where shall you get your hens?"

"I have already engaged ten over to neighbor Barber's," replied Ned.

"What me? Do you take to pay for them?" inquired Mr. Jackson. "Do you draw your money from the bank?"

"Oh, no," replied Ned, "that is drawing interest. It would not pay to take that out now, as I have more than fifteen dollars in my savings bank on the clock shelf. I shall use from that."

Ned hurried off to the shop, and the rest of the day was quite busy getting it ready for the new occupants. That night he honest biddies, that for more than a week had been determined to sit on nothing if they could only sit, were taken from their poverty stricken nests, and shortly placed on nests of fresh meadow hay, with thirteen eggs in each. It is often the case that hens moved from one place to another refuse to sit, but these biddies were a determined lot. When Ned placed them on the eggs, they fluttered about at first, but he held them down a few moments. They soon recognized the bonanzas on which they had been placed, and were quickly adjusting their feet in comfortable and appropriate positions with their bills. Before Ned left the shop that night ten very contented hens were watching, Ned and his lantern as he made things snug before leaving.

"How do you expect to feed your hens and chickens, Ned," asked his father, as he came into the sitting room after his work.

"I have a few bushels of those small potatoes that I raised last season that I did not sell. These I shall boil up and mash them and mix meal with them, as I need reserving, of course, what I need for planting, should I conclude to plant any potatoes this season. I have already ordered a bag of meal at the grain store."

That night Ned entered on a page, under the heading of "Hen Business," the following items of expense:

April 1. Paid for ten hens at 25¢ each... \$2.50
" " 130 eggs at 2¢... 2.60
" " 1 bag of meal... 1.50

"Well," said his father, "you have made quite an investment to-day. I think. Do you expect to make much from it?"

"I hope to, father," Ned replied, "folks do make a good thing from poultry, and I see no reason why I cannot be as lucky as the best. I have been reading a good deal about poultry raising lately."

"Have you any special plans about feed?" asked Mr. Jackson.

"That bag of meal and my potatoes will run the chickens some time; I shall finally feed them considerable chopped meat," replied Ned.

"But meat will be expensive, Ned, will it not?" inquired Mr. Jackson.

"Oh, no, father," replied Ned; "it will be the cheapest of all food. In the place, meat is a necessity for growing and laying hens, and it was the food nature intended them to eat. I was down to the slaughter house the other day, and I noticed that they threw away a good deal of meat that would be good for hens, and I asked them what they would save out some of the best of it for, if I should ever want to go into the hen business, and they said one cent a pound, and a considerable thrown in besides, if I would come after it. I think I can reduce the grain bill one half by the use of this meat."

Ned's hens attended strictly to their business, and in three weeks he had ninety healthy little chicks which thrived wonderfully well.

"I never saw chickens grow so fast and strong," remarked Mr. Jackson to his wife. "They are twice as large as mine that hatched out at the same time. I do not see how he managed. By the way, wife, what does he bring home from town every other day in that covered bucket?"

"I do not know," replied Mrs. Jackson. "But I asked him what he had there the other day, and he simply laughed and said it was a kind of chicken expander he was experimenting with."

"Ned is a queer one," responded Mr. Jackson. "He thinks a good deal, and he is pretty sure to work out something. There he goes with his pail now. I think I will go down to the hen house and see what he really is up to, and with these words Mr. Jackson arose and went after Ned."

When he reached the hen house he noticed that Ned had already put some mashed potatoes and bread in a bucket which he was pouring a liquid of red color into it, which he stirred quickly together, while the chickens and old hens were crowding around him in the greatest excitement.

"What are you doing Ned," said his father very quizzically, for really he did not know.

"Getting the chickens' breakfast," replied Ned.

"Yes, I suppose so, but what is that you have in that bucket?" queried Mr. Jackson.

"Blood," replied Ned.

"What?" exclaimed Mr. Jackson. "Fresh blood," replied Ned.

"Where did you get it, I would like to know."

"Why, father, I get it at the slaughter house. When they kill cattle there they pour the blood into a trough, and it runs down a spout, and I got leave to catch it and take it home. They slaughter cattle every other day, so I go down there and fill my pail."

"Well, what all the trouble for, I should like to know," said Mr. Jackson.

"What do you feed your chickens on, father?" said Ned.

"Mashed potatoes and meal," said Mr. Jackson.

"Yours were hatched the same day as mine, were they not?" continued Ned.

"I believe so," said his father.

"And mine are now as large again as yours," said Ned.

"That is a fact," replied Mr. Jackson. "I have fed mine as you did with mashed potato, meal, and blood besides."

"I see," said Mr. Jackson. "You claim the extra growth to be on that account, do you?"

"Exactly," responded Ned.

"That made you think of it?"

"Why, two of the hens got to fighting one day and blood ran from their combs, and I noticed that the little chickens tried to pick at it with unusual ardor. They were crazy for it, and I thought it would be excellent to make mashed potatoes more palatable for them. Potatoes are not over above good in the spring of the year."

"So you are a believer in blood food for chickens," said Mr. Jackson.

"I have proved it," replied Ned, "and you have seen the result."

After four weeks Ned separated the hens from the chickens, and began feeding them scraps of meat and grain, and it was not long before the hens were laying eggs again.

"It beats all how Ned makes the hens lay," said his father one day to Mr. Jackson. "He holds a magic wand over them. He commands, and they lay an egg."

At the end of three months he made a division of the chickens. His father noticed that he exercised considerable care in so doing.

"What are you dividing your chickens for?" asked Mr. Jackson.

"I am separating the young roosters that I may quicker prepare them for the market. I shall do all I can to give the fat-producing fowls for the next month."

At the end of the fourth month Ned actually had fifty as fine spring chickens as the town afforded for which landlord Jones gave him an extra price.

Only ten out of Ned's ninety chickens died during the season, and when the fall months came he had still thirty fine pullets. They began to lay early—about the time the old hens began to show symptoms of wanting to set they were killed, and he sold them at a fair price in the market.

CHAPTER X Ned's Farm Once More.

It must not be thought because Ned became so interested in his chickens and hens that he forgot his little farm the use of which his father had given him until he was of age. He had planned at the closing of the first year to raise squashes, and he found that his labors were easier than in the year previous. His compost heap proved to be sufficient for fertilizing purposes. Ned hid off his field into squares, containing about nine square yards, and he concluded that he could safely plant one hundred and thirty-five hills of squashes. He planted Turban squashes, Hubbard and Marrow. When the plants came up he kept them carefully watered, using frequently the contents of the sink barrel at the end of the sink-pipe. He carefully watched and directed the vines in their growth, so that the ground might be wholly covered.

It was near the beginning of autumn when Ned's father asked him concerning the profits of his squash field.

"I think I shall get at least two tons," said Ned.

"Where are you not wild?" said Mr. Jackson. "I hope not father? I ought to have a little better than an average crop," responded Ned.

"What would an average crop be, Ned?"

"That depends," replied Ned, "on the state of the country and even the town; but the Massachusetts commissioner of Agriculture says that five tons of Hubbard's is a decent crop, six tons a good crop, eight tons a very good crop, and he has known as high as eleven and a half tons raised, and he has raised fourteen tons of marrows to the acre himself."

"So you think yours will be a little above the average, do you?" replied Mr. Jackson.

"Yes, I think so," said Ned. "I have been counting the squashes and making calculations, and if I have not figured too large, and I hardly think I have, I shall get over two tons on my quarter acre, I shall have so many that I may not get so much per pound as I did last year, but turban squashes are worth more than Hubbard's, so I may make a good average price, as there have been but few raised in the vicinity."

Four weeks after this, the committee of the Farmers' Club came to visit Ned's field. As it was necessary to have the weight of the crop, for two days Ned had been weighing the squashes on some platform scales, which his father owned, and just as the committee came, he had completed adding up the weight, and much to his gratification, he found that the sum total was 4,652 pounds.

"There is no question but the squash prize belongs to Ned, is there, Mr. Sharp?" said Mr. Hooper, the second member of the committee.

"Not the least question," replied that gentleman. "The five dollars will be awarded to you, Ned," said both these gentlemen, turning to the young farmer.

"We have seen the other fields and you win."

Col. Hooper was in haste and rode away but Mr. Jared Sharp, combining pleasure with business, had taken his daughter Nellie with him for a drive. He stopped a few moments longer to talk with Ned, and to ask him questions about his work. Nellie was an excellent listener and when she had heard the committee say that Ned had won the prize Ned imagined, as he shyly looked at her, that a flush of pleasure came to her face.

He thought he would like to go out to the carriage and speak to her, but he thought of his work clothes, noticed her silk dress and handsome hat, and felt there was far too much contrast in their lot.

As Mr. Sharp still talked with Ned, about the squashes, Ned selected a fine one and asked him if he would accept it.