

The Little Englishman

Martha Standing Foster (1970)

Notes:

This piece is formatted and numbered for choral reading. Written for eight readers.

The names for the six sons the family actually used appear on page eleven. 'Harry' = Henry and 'Teddy' = George Edwin. "Idyhoe" on page eight refers to the steamship ss Idaho, 1870.

The Little Englishman was first recited by Cameron Foster at the 100th anniversary 1970 reunion: <https://standingfamily.org/archives/CameronLittleEnglishman70.mp3> (audio file) and it has been traditionally performed as a group reading chorus since. This script is taken from the 2010 group reading: <https://standingfamily.org/archives/LittleEnglishmanSFR2010.mp3> (audio file). Listening to both of the above readings makes for good practice.

Theodore Standing Foster, June 2021

All He Come a-ridin' in a carriage, this little Englishman.

Come a-ridin' in a carriage, this little Englishman.

1 You should seen 'em!

Top hat,

fancy cane,

striped pants.

All Come a-ridin' -- right out here on this prairie,

right out here on this timber land,

right out here – right out here.

2 What do you want Mister Englishman?

3 What you want with this prairie land?

2 + 3 Whatcha doin' here?

- 1 Whatcha doin' with your top hat an' your fancy cane?
- 2 Whatcha doin' here, you and your missus?
- 3 Whatcha doin', you an' your kids?
- 1+2+3 Whatcha doin' here?
- 4 Them kids! You shouda seen 'em! Biggest one maybe
 fourteen, Littlest a babe. Gen-u-wine suits, white
 shirts, big bow ties, Hats like their Pa's!
- All Shouda seen 'em,
 shouda seen 'em,
 shouda seen 'em, them five boys.
- 4 An' their ma!
- All Oh their ma!
 Fust real lady ever I saw.
- 4 Sittin' up straight,
 sittin' like a queen,
 silk dress,
 bonnet on her head.
- All Sittin' there beside her man;
 sittin ' right there beside her man.
- 2 Whatcha doin' here, little Englishman?
- 5 "I'm looking for land", says he.

6 You crazy, Mister Englishman?

You Crazy, or somethin'?

This land ain't no place fer the likes o' you.

I'd go back where I come from if I was you.

All Go back where you come from.

Back where I come from if I was you.

5 "I will build a house", says he.

"Right out here on this prairie.

Right out here on this timber land.

I will build a house", says he.

7 Who's it fer, Mister?

This house you're building.

Who's it fer?

5 "For her", says he. "For Debbie", says he.

8 "And thee", says Debbie;

"for thee and me",

1 Smilin' at him tender as ever I see.

8 The house is for George and the boys and me.

The house is for George and the boys and me.

All Smilin' at him tender as ever I see.

2 Oh Lord, she was a lady, that Debbie.

3 Ain't no place fer you, Ma'am --
 this prairie, this timber land.

4 We got us a hard life.

6 We got pain and we got death,

7 We got floods and we got drought,

1 We got tornados, we got blizzards,

2 We got prairie fires to burn your house;

3 We got wolves,

4 We got rattlesnakes.

All Oh Lordy, lady, what ain't we got?

6 We ain't got money,

7 We ain't got books,
 except the Good Book, maybe,
 I guess we got that.

All An' the neighbors, lady, are miles away.
 What neighbors there is are miles away,
 Oh lady, lady, they're miles away.

8 "You are rich", says Debbie.
 "You have a prairie, the grassy sea;
 you have the rivers and red haw tree,
 and purple plums and the wild pink rose,

and scarlet hills where the sumac grows,
and meadowlarks,
and hickory nuts,
and evening mist,
and morning sky,
and you have neighbors and so shall I.

You have neighbors, and so shall I.”

1 We got dirt, lady;

2 We ain’t clean.

3 We got lice.

4 We got bedbugs, lady.

8 “Have you tried kerosene”? says Debbie.

6 Oh Lord, she was a lady,

All Take her back, George;

take her back, you fool Englishman.

5 “She won’t go”, says George.

“She’s stubborn, my Debbie”.

7 Debbie smiles tender as ever I see.

8 “As stubborn as thee - as stubborn as thee”, says Debbie.

5 “We’ll stay right here”, says George.

“We’ll stay right here on this prairie;

we'll stay right here on this timber land.

I'll build a house with my own timber", says George.

7 You got an ax you kin lift, Mister?

6 You got a saw?

4 This timber's virgin, Mister - -

(pardon me ma'm).

All This timber's virgin and ain't been cut.

3 Trees wider'n you is tall, Mister,

All Too tall and wide fer you to cut.

Too tall fer a squirt like you to cut.

5 "I have sons", says George.

1 Oh Lord! You shouda seen 'em, them kids :

2 Gen-u-wine suits.

3 White shirts.

4 Big bow ties.

6 Hats like their pa.

All An I guess a million dreams maybe,

a-lightin' their eyes,

you shouda seen 'em.

7 Oh Lord, whatcha doin' here, Mister?

5 "I will plant a field", says George.

 "Wheat, barley,

 corn, oats.

 I will plant a field", says George.

1 Mister, this land's prairie;

2 Ain't never been plowed, Mister.

3 This land's grass. Roots clean to China.

4 This land's hazel brush; basswood; oak-roots.

All To China and back.

6 Think a squirt like you - -

All Goin' to grub them roots?

 Goin' to grub them roots to China and back?

5 "I have sons", says George.

7 Oh Lord !

 you crazy, Mister Englishman?

 you crazy, or somethin'?

All Go back where you come from, That's what I'd do.

 Go back where you come from if I was you.

 Back where you come from if I was you.

1 Well, we thought they'd gone. Thought we'd skeered 'em

 off. Thought they'd gone back to Leigh,

 Ashton-Under-Lynn, London, Buckingham Palace.

Missed 'em, sorta. Thought we'd never see
'em again, Did though.

All Come a-ridin' back one day,
that little Englishman,
them five boys, that Debbie.

2 Glad to see 'em, sort of. Even them boys.
Mornin' George.

5 "Good morning, friend."

3 Had,
cows, horses, plow;
you name it.

4 Had,
three wagon loads of furniture - -
brought it from England on the Idyhoe, they says.

All Three wagon loads!

6 Lord, Mister,
how big a house you aimin' to build?

5 "Big as I need", says George

7 Well, that little Englishman
didn't know beans 'bout buildin' a house,

6 'bout breakin' prairie,

7 'bout grubbin' roots,

6 'bout plowin',

7 diskin',

6 harrowin',

7 plantin'.

All That little Englishman didn't know beans.

That little Englishman didn't know beans.

1 Brung all the wrong tools.

Listened to the wrong people.

Got took.

All Fer awhile, that is.

2 Yep, He got took --

All Fer awhile, that is.

3 But he never let on,

an' he never took back.

4 That dern Englishman was an honest man.

He was an honest man.

6 Lord, he was honest! Why, one time he hitched up

Frank and Polly to the carriage and him and Debbie driv

fifteen miles all because some fool over in Adel give 'em

too much change. Ten cents, maybe.

Lord, he was honest!

7 Still he got took.

All Fer awhile, that is.

1 But let me tell you it wan't fer long. No siree bob, it wan't
fer long. 'Cause there wan't no flies on George, an'
whatever George said he's do, he done.

All He said,

5 "I'll build that house".

All Said,

5 "I'll grub those roots".

All Said,

5 "I'll plow that field".

All Said,

5 "I'll sow that wheat".

2 An' he done it. George done it.

That spunky little Englishman wouldn't be beat.

All No, that spunky little Englishman wouldn't be beat!

3 Seen 'im every Sunday a-ridin' in his carriage.

4 Goin' to Meetin' with his missus and his boys.

3+4 Ridin' to Meetin' across the prairie.

All Ridin' to Meetin' with his missus and his boys.

3+4 An' them boys!

3 Gen-u-wine suits

4 White shirts

3 Big bow ties

4 Hats like their Pa

3+4 A-ridin' to Meetin' with their Pa and their Ma.

All A-ridin' to Meetin' with their Pa and their Ma.

6 An' their Ma! She was a lady, That Debbie.

7 Sittin' there beside her man.

 Sittin' up straight -- Sittin' like a queen.

6+7 Smilin at him tender as ever I seen.

 Sittin' right there beside her man.

All Mornin' George.

5 "Good morning, friend".

All Mornin' lady,

8 "A good morning to thee".

All Mornin', Harry;

 mornin', Ernest;

 mornin', Teddy;

 mornin', Charles;

 mornin', Alfred;

 mornin', Josiah.

1 Yep, I said Josiah -- there were six of 'em by then.

 You should seen 'em.

All You shoulda seen 'em, them six fine boys;

ridin' out here on this prairie;

ridin' out here on this timber land;

ridin' out here.

Right out here;

right out here on this timber land.