

Spuds and Experience

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even more seriously, "I've been thinking, our potatoes won't be graded like those in the store," with an emphatic movement of earnings and expenses, "some of our potatoes will be so small we'll have to throw them out to the chickens—if we have any to—"

Palmer folded his stamp sheets leisurely while he spoke of gross mismanagement. Nowell declared that the syndicate was a hold-up. Burgis, working outside among per diem sheets, perceived the group, and hurried in to add his condemnation.

"It's in the hands of capable men," corrected Trevor. "There's no crookedness; it's a misfortune."

"Gross miscalculation," drawled Palmer.

"Look here," cried Nowell, stepping close to Trevor's desk and tapping it with his index finger, "in the first place, when the committee handed to the purchasing department the requisition for potato seed, prices had gone up—then the purchasing department referred it back," speaking rapidly and raising his voice, "by the time the order was placed—"

"Prices had gone up again, of course," chipped in Durant (disburser of the company's finances seven hours daily, and city farmer the rest of the time), who managed to slide invoices to the Comptroller while other men were waiting to see him.

A vote of censure on the potato syndicate was suggested by Palmer. Information was volunteered by Burgis that the contract had been left to a Chink who had sublet it, to which Palmer submitted that the Chink was working in legitimate style.

"Some of the boys went out and hoed. By the way, Trevor," and Nowell stared at him accusingly, "I never saw you out there hoeing." He paused, then resumed, "Don't you remember at the meeting it was said that we'd have to go out Saturday afternoons in the summer and hoe—you remember?" glancing around, "said what good exercise—"

"I didn't know till after," argued Trevor. Disdainfully, Nowell scanned the slender hands and manicured fingernails of the Comptroller's clerk.

Then a grumble came from Nowell because he had not seen any of the committee out hoeing. It was explained, however, that they all belonged to the tennis and rowing clubs.

Suddenly, Burgis, who lived near the race track, recollected his wife had been buying potatoes every week from a Chink, who told her that he dug them off a patch near the race track.

That reminded Palmer of something. One of the boys, not a shareholder, had seen someone digging spuds close to the race track one Saturday and mentioned it when he heard Palmer talking about potatoes. Upon being questioned, he said: "Come to think of it, the man looked like a Chink."

October almost gone! Trevor was getting interested in the potato crop on account of Mrs. Trevor's frequent inquiries.

Pat Scolly, of the Audit department, had been asked to call upon a certain widow living in the vicinity of the race track. She was reputed to be holding a stock of potatoes, an abnormal stock considering that never before had she been known to have a stock of anything. Just as Trevor was wondering if Scolly had seen her, Scolly passed the door. Trevor beckoned to him.

"What about the widow and the potatoes?" eagerly, "Did you call on her?"

"Yes, I saw thirty or forty sacks of potatoes in her one-room shack." Intuition guided Nowell into the room in time to hear the last words. "Of course, I wasn't ungallant enough to count them."

Nowell demanded to know where she got the potatoes. Scolly shrugged his shoulders, saying, there was not a potato patch near except theirs.

"Of course, we wouldn't mind her taking say ten sacks," commented Palmer, "but thirty, or forty—that's—"

five shares, I jumped at the chance—and now—" Nowell shot a glance into the Comptroller's room then resumed,

Meanwhile Palmer entered, and shoving his hands into his pockets, found a leaning place against a file cabinet.

In view of the widow's circumstances, Scolly hinted that it might be considered unchivalrous to bother the old girl. His attitude toward the poor and simple widow was endorsed by Palmer, but not by Nowell, who objected that when they went into the potato business they did not know it was a philanthropic scheme. "I hope she'll choke if she eats any of my potatoes," Nowell concluded viciously. Looking enquiringly from one to the other, Trevor intimated that he understood the committee had given a Chink ten sacks of potatoes to watch the patch. This was confirmed by Scolly, who believed that the quantity bargained for was twenty sacks.

Nowell forced a laugh and admitted that he had planned to sell potatoes to some of the employees not fortunate enough to be shareholders. Scolly advised that his wife had offered potatoes to all her neighbors. Palmer merely hoped that they were not trying to take away the land, in case the head office should hear of it.

"By the way, I looked in at our city freight sheds," said Scolly, dipping into his pocket. "I counted two hundred, no—consulting a memorandum book, 'two hundred and five sacks from the race track. They say sixty or seventy sacks coming in from the other patch.'"

"Well, it's all experience," remarked Trevor, "we only get what's coming to us, including experience."



Beauty spot near Arden, Manitoba

Burgis tossed a sheet on to Trevor's desk a few days later. "Say, Herb," he cried, "what do you know about that?"

Aloud Trevor read a note dated November 6th, advising that the committee had decided to refund the money to those who had made the first payment only on their potato shares. Trevor stared at Burgis, who asked him if he had made his last payment, and he nodded affirmatively.

"Gee! I'm glad I didn't. Several of the boys got a refund, and," with a chuckle, "now we're going to buy Bellevue potatoes at a dollar seventy-five cents a sack delivered." With this, Burgis threw a beaming glance at the Comptroller's clerk and pranced out.

To the mailing boy waiting for stamps, Trevor observed good naturedly, "Well, if we're not making money, we're getting experience."

Hands in pockets, Palmer sauntered into the room. "First of November. Ought to be getting our potatoes pretty soon, eh, Herb?"

Trevor replied that he would be glad to see his. Palmer thought they ought to be good, they had been in the earth long enough.

Comptroller Leighton passed through. Closely following him was Nowell, who stopped at Trevor's desk to whisper, "Quarterly meeting of the association was to have been held next Saturday, but it's postponed until the potatoes are delivered. Social club going to give a dance instead."

Asked by Trevor if any official information had been given out at the recent committee meeting, Nowell frowned and said that in reply to a question as to how many potatoes there should be, the chairman had stated frankly he was not prepared with figures.

"Talking about those spuds?" queried Durant, bursting in with a bunch of invoices and stepping up to the peephole. "Why didn't they ask somebody who knew something about farming?" demanded Durant unexpectedly, for he seldom had time to join in the potato conferences. "I could have told them that that land should have been worked six months before it was planted," he continued. "The two acre patch was sour, anyway," striding to the Comptroller's door, then stopping short.

"The six acres is in the midst of a well known Chink neighborhood," resumed Durant. "Another thing, the potatoes are being turned up—turned up with a plow instead of being dug—flourishing 'Rush' invoices, 'think of it—turned up with a plow—that's only done when there's shortage of labor. Worse yet," with a wise look, "the potatoes are being put right in the sacks, not laid on the ground to dry—they'll all rot if you don't spread'."

Nowell interrupted to tell how the boys in the payroll department had gone to a farm at Trentville on Saturday and dug potatoes for two hours, had the sacks tagged and loaded before five o'clock, and the company charged a minimum freight of thirty-five cents or fifteen cents a sack.

Straightway, Durant reported that the Purchasing department had bought for

three sacks," tittered Nowell, "and," exploding into laughter, "his wife got after the man—"

Scolly finished the sentence. "She asked the fellow who took them in how many potatoes he was getting for his shares, and he said 'Thank God, madam, I haven't any shares.'"

It seemed impossible to settle down to the afternoon's work before comparing notes about the latest potato deliveries.

Palmer poked his head into Trevor's room, and indicating a two-pound package of rice bought for Mrs. Trevor, inquired "Are those your potatoes, Herb?" Upon seeing that Nowell and Burgis were there, he came inside, and reported that he had received two sacks of potato tops and dirt for his six shares.

Immediately, Nowell told how he had dumped into the garbage can the only sack of so-called potatoes that had yet been left at his house. He intimated that he did not care if they never left any more.

For the seventh time Burgis repeated a rumour that Scolly was afraid to go home since the potatoes had been delivered. Trevor phoned to the city freight yards, and inquired when his potatoes would be delivered. Needham advised that his men could not reach the "T" deliveries till the next day.

"It's a gamble," declared Trevor, stretching his legs underneath the desk. "If potatoes were selling for four dollars a sack, you fellows would be tickled to death. But," he added, with a glow of enthusiasm, "we're getting experience."

Next morning, Trevor left home early. "To see about the potatoes," he explained to his wife. At the company's freight yards, he interviewed Needham, who had charge of the potato deliveries; thence he hurried to Smith's market.

Mrs. Trevor was more animated than usual when she welcomed her husband that evening.

"The potatoes have just come, Herb," she exclaimed delightedly. "Six sacks—they're just fine—big and smooth. Come and look!"

After dinner, Trevor repeated to his wife a conversation he had had with Comptroller Leighton before leaving the office. As a result, the couple spent the evening planning for the future.

The following morning Palmer wandered into Trevor's office from force of habit. "Got your potatoes, Herb?" he asked.

"His potatoes!" blurted out Nowell, who followed close on Palmer's heels. "Say, Scolly was down to the freight yards—came across a couple of sacks labeled 'Clifford Seymore Orphanage,' and," slowly and emphatically, "he found they were Trevor's potatoes."

"Well, Herb, how about the potato situation?" inquired Durant, bustling out from the Comptroller's office.

Mechanically, Trevor's pen dipped into the inkwell, and mechanically the superfluity of ink splattered on the floor. Leaning back, Trevor smilingly surveyed the men, and answered, "Oh, it's cured me—anyway for a while—of back to the land."

Bubbling over, Durant could wait no longer. "I've just asked for the rest of my holidays—I'm going to move on to my new place," he announced with unmistakable pride, "I've traded my lots for two acres on the interurban line."

"Well, you must admit we're all getting experience," contended the Comptroller's clerk still smiling.

SHE WAS SHOPPING

A lady had been sitting in a furniture shop for nearly two hours inspecting the stock of linoleums, says the Chicago Journal. Roll after roll the perspiring assistant brought out, but still she seemed dissatisfied. From her dress she judged her to be a person of wealth, and thought it likely that she would have a good order to give. When at last he had shown her the last roll, he paused in despair.

"I'm very sorry, madam," he said apologetically, "but if you could wait I could get some more pieces from the factory. Can you call again?"

The prospective customer gathered her belongings together and rose from the chair.

"Yes, do," she said, with a gracious smile, "and ask them to send you some with very small designs, suitable for putting in the bottom of a canary's cage."

the company's camps selected potatoes wholesale at twenty-four dollars a ton delivered.

"Could have got them for a dollar a sack delivered if they'd bought of the farmers," snapped Nowell.

Trevor stopped any quibbling by his quiet remark, "We're getting experience."

On the morning of November seventh interest in the potato situation was feverish. In alphabetical order, delivery of the potatoes had begun.

Trevor took from the Comptroller's stenographer a typewritten statement headed "Cost of living" while he asked if she had got her potatoes.

"Potatoes! she exclaimed scornfully, 'We got two sacks for five shares. Sacks tied in the middle, the bottoms filled with dirt. One of the sacks gave way when the man was taking it in the back yard.' Reaching the door, she turned and cried, 'Rotten—absolutely rotten.'"

At noon Trevor waited for a car. Across the street, in front of Smith's market, stood a bulletin board. Ponderingly, Trevor followed the words, which seemed needlessly conspicuous, "Choice Bellevue Potatoes, \$1.75 a sack, delivered."

Outside the Comptroller's office stood a group of men returned from lunch.

"Needham's men won't deliver any more potatoes, they're getting so much abuse from the women," snickered Burgis, slapping his knee.

Trevor stuck his hands behind his back and looked thoughtful.

"One of the boys who had eight shares—they delivered him a sack and a half for