

Spuds and Experience

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

Written for The Western Home Monthly by Elizabeth C. Hazelton

SEEMS to me this is the clearinghouse for all the kicks and rumors of the—what shall I call it?—the Potatoe Syndicate, eh," remarked Herbert Trevor, the Controller's clerk. Tying with a paper cutter, he smilingly contemplated the man who stood, papers in hand, on the opposite side of his desk.

"As long as you keep that 'second and last call' in plain sight you must expect us to relieve our feelings," rejoined John Burgis, who side-stepped towards the glass partition to peep through an opening in the curtain, then slipped into Comptroller Leighton's office with his per diem sheets.

Dipping his pen into the inkwell, Trevor shook the surplus ink on the dark felt floor covering, but evinced no inclination to resume his grapple with "Cost of Living" statistics. Instead, he gazed steadily through the glass panelled door at the men, girls and desks in the main office beyond. He saw none of them, however.

For months Trevor had been so absorbed in the study of "back to the land" literature, and the choice of a homestead location, that nothing else seemed to him important. Although he had never planted a seed nor a bulb, yet he was determined that the following spring he would start on a homestead with his family and the fifteen hundred dollars he had saved. In fact, already he had mentioned his plans to Comptroller Leighton, with whom he was on a somewhat friendly footing, having been the Comptroller's office boy long before he became his clerk. Comptroller Leighton had recommended him to stay with the company, and supported the advice by information that a substantial raise was scheduled for him in the spring, and that promotion and further salary increase would develop in time. All that had looked quite ordinary to Trevor compared with the prospect of independence on a homestead, still he was careful never to mention to his wife anything the Comptroller had said. Nobody took seriously Trevor's homestead idea. Comptroller Leighton expected he would forget it; his wife, Edith Trevor, hoped he would, and his office comrades—especially "Farmer Durant" (so-called because he owned and cultivated three lots)—were sure he would. Reference to that "second and last call" had set Trevor thinking. He glanced at the calendar. October 10th! Yes, it was time to think about potatoes. He recalled the meeting of the office employees' association on the evening of May 23rd. Of course, the quarterly meeting of the association should have been held early in April, according to the by-laws. But those meetings never had been called regularly nor attended largely; the subsidiary clubs seemed to capture the interest. It had been a bumper meeting. Lots of the girls there, too. The general manager had urged them to combat the high cost of living by raising potatoes. Not only had he recognized the scarcity of suitable land near the city, but had offered the association free use of the corporation's land—six acres beside the race track and two acres adjoining the suburban freight sheds. Further, he had guaranteed delivery of the potatoes at a nominal rate.

Once more Trevor's pen dipped into the inkwell, and again the ink dashed on to the floor. How convincing had been the blackboard figures by which shareholders were assured of two sacks of potatoes for each share.

Trevor's meditations halted, for into his office came a woman. As the accredited representative of Clifford Seymour Orphanage, she sailed into the Comptroller's sanctum and out again. She bore away a donation from the Comptroller and a promise from the Comptroller's clerk. The promise was an impulse arising from thoughts of two

kiddies at home, and was almost regretted when the "cost of living" statistics obtruded themselves.

Return to reverie was easy for Trevor. What a scramble there had been for the six hundred potatoe shares at one dollar! Gripping his pen, the young man pressed each hand on the edge of the desk and

stiffened his back. He was more than fortunate to have secured six shares. Edith had commended his foresight. The assessment notice caught his eye. He drew it from under the leather corner of his desk blotter, and re-read the last call for fifty cents per share on his six shares, due on October 15th.

Trevor replaced the notice contentedly. Some of the boys were bringing in disquieting reports. Nothing but rumors. So, with a final dip and a final shake, he concentrated on the "cost of living" problem as applied to employees of a transportation company.

"The shareholders are dubious about the potatoe situation," advised Ned Palmer, strolling into Trevor's room one

morning to get stamps for the Superintendent's office.

"Don't worry, it'll be all right, bound to," Trevor checked off an imaginary list. "See—there's elimination of wholesalers' profits, retailers' profits, taxes, overhead expenses—and—" He leaned back, and between bites at his penholder he expressed himself confidently, "we're bound, simply bound, to come out the way—"

Fred Nowell, who was waiting to show the Comptroller some drafted earnings and expenses, piped up "I hope so," whereupon Palmer twitted him of being a big shareholder.

"Worse luck! I bought six shares, then Jim Wright wanted to sell me his

Continued on Page 18

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