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BACK TO THE PITCHFORK AGAIN

SOMEWHERE, somehow, there is some farmer who needs a man about my heft and build for something or other.

I don't know who he is, or where he is, or just exactly what he wants to do with me. But I'm going to have a guess or two. Of course when he sees me he may conclude that I'm not the man he wants at all, and I may be sent to finish my holidays in empty-headed Muskoka. But I rather think we shall be very much together, some crinkle-headed, hard-fisted coon with a mussy moustache and a hundred acres, twenty-five of it oats, twenty fall wheat—barley and hay, it being all in now, will not concern me. I don't expect him to like me. All I expect of him is plenty of hard work, long hours, good wages, square meals and a comfortable bed all to myself. The moment I find myself sleeping with any other hired man I shall go to the haymow, and in the morning be found wanting on that farm.

In the flurry of the wheat I shall forget the sanctum. And I may revise my ideas about farming, because it's some years now since I had the privilege of pitching sheaves on to a waggon—the one thing in this life that I never had any doubt that I knew how to do up to a hundred per cent. efficiency, and compared to the average farmer about 120.

I am yearning just now to go at that wheat. Two fields back from the barn on its knoll I can see long rows of shocks brown and wind-beaten and dry, just waiting for me. The farmer—call him Moses—will leave it to me what part of the job I prefer; also he will exempt me from swilling hogs, currying horses and cleaning out stables. I am to become a sheaf expert. For the ten days I am to be on that farm I expect to do nothing but sling sheaves, driving the team on the rope-end of the slings at the barn, mowing away and pitching on. If the farmer has another hired man and two waggons all the better. But I am dreaming of two teams, two waggons and another man with either a boy or a woman to drive the team at the barn. That leaves me in the field along with the oats, jug and the dog, all day long, out where the breezes blow, among the long brown lines of the shocks that ultimately go up into the racks of the waggons at a rate of speed never known in those parts. For the first day I shall wear old gloves to ward off blisters. The second day I shall have the kinks out of my back and shoulders by noon. By the third day I shall be up to top speed.

PITY those teamsters and loaders! They will trot their horses in the lane so as to give me no time to rest, and the man in the mow will be busier than any pup at a root he ever saw. They are out to bush me; to send me panting and tuckered and dizzy to the shade of the big hickory where the water-jug is, there to lie flat on my back till a bumble-bee from his clover-side nest nearby crawls up my overalls.

*How Different It All Was From What Is Set Down Here
Will Be Told in a Coming Issue*



By THE EDITOR
Illustrated by T. W. McLean

But they do not know me. They imagine that a man who works with a lead pencil and typewriter and who used to be a farmer in the days when they bound all the sheaves by hand and cradled around the stumps, is some sort of agricultural joke. Twenty years and more ex-farming has taken the tuck out of him. Out among the wheat-shocks or the oat-shocks he will crumple up like a loose bag of sand and ask to have his wages reduced because he finds he is not up to the scratch.

Hence I am aching to demonstrate. I shall begin my first day without a word of warning to the man who loads the sheaves. He will think I act a bit awkward; that I do not know gee from haw and have not gumption enough to know which end of the waggon he wants the sheaves first. I shall not disillusion him. I am to surprise him. If he begins

to load with a fork I shall not tell him that every good loader uses his hands and kneels down to the job. If he takes too long adjusting the ropes under each lift I shall pretend I am jolly well glad of the rest while he is doing it. I may even sit down by the next shock. And by no means shall I have a sheaf poised upon high waiting to whop it on before the horses are stopped.

No, that farmer is to have no premonitions that I am a sheaf expert incog. He is to have the privilege of teaching me. When he growls that I am not putting the sheaves up the way he wants them I am to ask him,

"Kind sir, which way do you mean and I shall try to oblige you."

UP at the barn I shall fumble about the horses with the same mental detachment I am supposed to show getting into a taxi—whenever I am able to afford such a thing. I won't pretend to know the off horse from the nigh, or whether the tugs are wrong when they are hooked up with a twist, or that the neckyoke has no business being hitched to the bits. I am as likely as not to water the horses when they are hot and to advise feeding them oats before we go into dinner. I shall carefully refrain from talking about crops, of which I know nothing, and confine myself to conscription, of which I really know less. If the farmer's wife asks me about music in the evening I shall not pretend that her piano is not out of tune, and that I gloat over rag-time; but talk to her about operas and sonatas and great musicians I have met. I shall act as though I miss my napkin at the table, shall insist on wearing my coat at every meal, even though I leave off my collar and tie. I shall decline to "reach to and help myself," and shall insist on passing the butter to Madam first. I shall be wistful about eating both apple-sauce and apple-pie for dinner, apple-sauce and canned cherries for supper, and on the pretext of meatless days I shall take but one meal on pork every day, knowing quite well that day by day it will be the same pig. Going to bed I shall, of course, on no account, pull off my boots in the kitchen, but wear them to my bed-room and leave the chaff on the rag carpet; and in the morning I shall shave myself before I dress and expect to wash in the bath-room instead of in the family tin basin down at the kitchen stoop—knowing, alas! that there is no bath-room.

For two days until I get my second wind I shall maintain this sophisticated dignity. Then about ten o'clock of the third day off goes my mask. What happens back in that field of shocks? My first is a pair of sheaves heaved up at once just for a starter. In six whops a shock is up in nine seconds, and before the waggon is up to the next shock I have two, perhaps three, sheaves in the air ready to lam that farmer before the horses stop. If he growls I am too busy to hear him. If he swears I pay no