

## The Hired Man.

There's a hired man up in Maine who gets up with the sun. One hundred and fifty acres depend on him—and not in vain. There are also three cows, two horses, and a litter of tiny pigs which put their trust in him—and win out.

A summer camp of fifty city people swarm over the place, and he usually has to repair the damage. Several of the campers try farming every third day.

This hired man lives with his wife and five daughters—oldest, twelve—in what was once a chicken coop. It is still attached to the barn, but last spring the hired man cleaned it out, hammered in some boards, and his wife did the rest. Now it's a romantic two-room cabin, neat as a pin.

Have you ever tried farming? It's fun to get up at 4.30 or 5.30—once in a while. Sometimes the air is white and brilliant and the light lies like snow on every blade of grass. It makes one breathless with its early glory. A handful of birds are tuning up; the skies are deepening into blue; there's a mist floating a foot deep over the sloping fields. Then is the time to get into the garden. Everything is sopped with dew, each leaf that brushes the hand is fresh and wet, and in the vast silence—no sound in all the miles around save scattered bird music—there is a joy in being close to mother earth. Her soil is moist and brown and fragrant, her depth and breadth are full of strength. And then suddenly on the very topmost spray of a blossoming pear tree a bobolink breaks into song. The music is so glad it lifts him up bodily and sends him winging into the sky, the song ascending in wild lisps with him.

There's a difference at eleven o'clock. Baking sod, broiling sun, smothering heat, and a sense of suffocation. Besides, the old earth is tough and it takes terrific whacks of a hoe to loose her up. The arm gets numb with a cramp and the back seems to crack and break.

So the would-be farmer disappears and is found later in an easy chair, a pail of icy well water at one side, a novel in his hands.

One hundred and fifty acres are a vast territory on a hot day. Eight heads of live stock are a great care. Fifty city people can make life a burden. And a family of five little girls in a two-room cabin cannot be overlooked. So every one—and especially the every-third-day farmers felt very sorry for the hired man.

"It's a shame," said one, "that some men have to work so hard. It's a mule's life."

"Oh, well," said another, cheerily, pulling at his pipe, "some day there'll be machinery to do all the drudge work."

This was very comforting, indeed. But out in the hayfield the hired man with his scythe was slashing great wads of grass. His whole body swung back and forth with the shining blade in a perfect rhythm, and on and on he went through dazzling sunshine. Now and then he wiped the drip from his forehead. "Some day" didn't seem to interest him or comfort him—he was actually interested in the work at hand and he had to do it. He did it.

And this is the strange thing about it. That hired man was the cheeriest man on the farm. In the early spring when the camp leaders were on the verge of despair—for they had the huge task of renovating a deserted farm—he said:

"This here job's got to be done, ain't it?"

"Yes—but how? Where can we begin? How can we ever do it?"

"Well," said the hired man, "if a job's got to be done it will be done. I'll start with the old barn and clean it out."

The job was done. And so all summer the job was done. He wasn't a genius—he was a simple

man—simple as Lincoln. But he was all there; he knew how to energize every particle of his being; he was strenuous.

It took three weeks of conversation in passing to get him in a corner to make him speak. It was late in the afternoon and he sat on the woodpile. His face was Indian-like with sun and wind and there was that liquid light about his eyes that speaks of the open and the earth.

"It's a hard life, farming," said one, "isn't it?"

"Guess any job's hard if you do it right," he answered.

"Yes, hard in a way. But farming—it takes it out of a man—you drudge all day and aren't worth a rap at night, and you have to be at it rain or shine and everlastingly. It's drudgery."

The hired man looked at us sharply and then chuckled.

"I ain't that kind of a farmer," he said. "I reckon nothing's drudge work when your heart and your brain and your spirit are in it."

"In hoeing and raking, planting and mowing?"

"Say," he murmured, "didn't it ever strike you as there's different sorts o' people in this world? That's my way of thinking. One is born to the law, and another to the church, and another to carpentering. One boy loves to play with tools and another with beetles and another with books. Well, sir, I reckon I was born a farmer."

"What! you love farming?"

"Reckon I do." He "wried" up his face and laughed. "I'd rather run a clean furrow down a field than do anything I can think of. There's a fellow up here what's a poet, ain't there?"

"He'd like to be, anyway," someone suggested.

"Look at me. Say," he burst out with a roar, "I'd make a queer fist writing poetry, wouldn't I?"

"He would make a queerer fist working a farm."

"There you got it," he cried, "that's it! A man's born into something—humble or high. I haven't a doubt some fellows can work in a railway gang better than anything else, others can break stones, and others be presidents of the United States. And here's my way of thinking—let a fellow follow his bent, and then go at it with his heart and his brain and his spirit, and he'll know the joy of being alive. Just like that bobolink yonder. That's what!"

No one felt sorry for the hired man after that. He is still on the job. He's a specialist and knows his business, and, more, he loves it.

There are many such as he in humble places who love their work and sing and whistle and laugh it through. The job is nothing; what they bring to the job is everything, what they take from the job is everything. They bring their hearts, their minds, their souls; they take strength, joy, progress. They grow on their little patches in the broad world like fruits in intensive agriculture. They attain height in a narrow space. Each becomes a man.

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