



## WHAT'S *the* MATTER with FARMING?

*Brief story based on recent experience of work that no labor union controls and meals that no Food Board regulates.*

By AUGUSTUS BRIDLE



The morning he went to the farm he not necessarily the writer—took his breakfast in the usual bored fashion, dividing his attention with the newspaper.

**M**OST of what's the matter with farming is that not enough people work at it, and that a great many of those who do are trying to run a modern-machinery plant by mediaeval methods. The first statement is truth; the second sounds like impertinence. But farming is a plain business and needs plain words.

If farmers and townfolk are ever to get rid of their No-Man's Land there will have to be a deal of plain speaking on both sides. When I worked on a farm as a lad I used to think that the fine person who drove along in his fancy rig had a sort of contempt for the clodhopper with the cowbite hat. I used to straighten up behind the harrows or take a tuck in the mowing of fence corners whenever one of those town nabobs in a phaeton with tassels all round the top drove along the town line. But the boot is on the other foot now. I know this because I have observed it. Two weeks ago I had just finished pitching on a load and was going up for a drink to the creek while the next wagon was coming from the barn when a neighbor, who was loading up barrels of water, looked up at the boss on the load and said:

"Say, Hiram, how do you git so many bookkeepers and dudes on this place?"

He grinned as he said it. One of those caustic grins of absolute and quite friendly contempt. That man I am sure had tried to hire a couple of city-men by offering them boy wages. He must have got one and found out what an abyss of agricultural ignorance he was. I met one of these tenderfoots on that same farm; a lean, dried-up little shaver too rickety for the draft, who had been hugging barley and oat sheaves for five days, one of which when he shocked barley was a 103 in the shade—and he was never in the shade.

"How do you like farming?" I asked him as he came mooching into an oat-field to shock up.

"Me? Oh, farmin's all right, I guess. But say—barley on a hot day is certainly a son of a gun."

That youth never will be a farmer except by the draft.

Extremes, however, do meet on the farm nowadays. No doubt I was one of them. But I had the nerve to ask a farmer top wages over the telephone, and he had called my bluff. I went. Fifty miles north of Toronto, not far from Lake Simcoe, I was faced up with the old, old job I had learned when a youth; one of the jobs that never can change no matter what machinery is invented.

At seven a.m., with two sheaves of wet oats at arm's length for shocking, I looked over the farm

and calculated that I was within sight of two million Scotch breakfasts. The farmer with whom I had engaged for as long as he could endure me at the price had 54 acres of oats, which would probably average 45 bushels to the acre. The price that morning was a dollar a bushel. Oats had never been so dear in the memory of man. Oats had climbed to the pinnacle which some farmers years ago said wheat never would regain—the dollar mark. Oats at three cents a pound in the raw. If a horse gets four quarts three times a day he gets away with 38 cents worth of oats. Do you wonder that your cartage man charges you more for moving? Or that your rolled oats carton is bulged in the price and shrunken in the contents?

And here were millions of Scotch breakfasts.

Down yonder in the city were half a million people.

At least half of these half million must regard porridge and cream and bacon as a luxurious breakfast. Yonder in the lane were twenty cattle. Rum-maging through a nearby oat field were thirty hogs. The farmer was too busy to spend time finding the holes in the fence through which they had wriggled. Twenty-cents-a-pound-on-the-hoof hogs were breakfasting on dollar-a-bushel oats. And the old dog never even noticed them. The hogs on that farm when matured at eight months would be worth \$1,500. The oats would round up \$2,500. Twelve acres of good wheat—salvaged from winter-kill—about a thousand more. Sheep at \$6 a fleece—almost found money. Eggs from a hundred hens—I bought all I could carry home at 40 cents a dozen. The cellar had small stacks of butter at between 40 and 45 cents a pound. Harvest and fall apple trees were loaded to the brim; barrels of apples windfalling, calves and hogs gobbling them up. Turnips, mangolds, and potatoes by the acre were bulging up near the barn. Buckwheat was in full bloom. The garden was ripe with squash, tomatoes, carrots and beets.

And a few days ago somebody downtown wailed about the possibility of a world famine. Where was it? Not here.

**S**HOCKING oats at a dollar a bushel is a privilege. Making the acquaintance of 1918 porkers is another. And the hogs know it. These adventurous pirates wriggle in everywhere except the kitchen and the spare bedroom. I caught three of them drinking leisurely at a pail of milk. The old-time hog always upset the bucket first and tried to drink the swill afterwards. These experts knew better than to waste food. The place for all available food was inside the hog. I heaved a brick at the trio. They turned to smell the brick and finding it not good to eat turned to the milk again. I kicked one of them in the shoulder. Kick an old-time hog and he squealed for a mile. This one did not even grunt. He turned to look at me severely—

"You do that again, Mr. Cityman, and I'll have you reported to the Food Board. I am a modern hog."

However, with all the astounding transformations in farm technic, the art of shocking is just what it was forty years ago, except that the binder has a sheaf carrier that dumps the sheaves in a sort of

sprawled-out windrow. If you are not too slow, seven acres of good oats is all you will shock in a day. That cool damp morning, with the boss and his gang pulling up big stones by a windlass on a huge truck, and the Government tractor snorting its way across a long field plowing for fall wheat, it seemed to me I could have shocked that whole 16-acre field by sundown.

But in half an hour I was soaked to the last stitch, all but the shoulders. I rolled my overalls above my knees and went at it Highlander style. My socks were soaked. I pulled them off. By noon, going barefoot in a pair of new boots, I had a battery of blisters on my feet. In the afternoon the binder went again, the stubble crackled and the field was hot. Miles to walk. Thousands of sheaves to lug. But down yonder at the far end of the field and half along one side was the twist of a glorious creek born in the spring of a hill, haunted by a pair of cranes and trailing away somewhere to the Nottawasaga. That creek I would have blessed in seven languages, yes, seventy times seven. Seven times a forenoon it found me down on my flats guzzling up the running water. In the shade of a clump maple, down in the gorge among the water-cress and the wild raspberries, out yonder by the jog where the creek scooted under a pole into a cow pasture, again in some other field just beyond the bridge where the water raced over a patch of stones, still again back by the wagon ford, or out in the lane where it became a mere thread in a baby canyon, best of all, as I found out back by the main-lane bridge at the foot of a clump of cedars, where the cool rivulet raced along the edge of the hill forty rods from the spring that started it from nowhere—at all times and places I made it the second joy in life to guzzle that creek. And whenever I got to a field where the creek was absent and the water pail was the only way, I felt lonesome.

I shocked three days on end. Then I was glad to go hauling—wheat, barley and oats. Three teams; one for hauling up the sling-loads in the barn, the others on two wagons keeping one man in the field by choice pitching on—which was the writer.

Hauling in if you earn your good wages plus board is no exercise for a college graduate. When you contract at top wages and the farmer calls your bluff, you go up at once against an organized scheme operated by experts who are as hard as nails, while you are at first as soft as butter. But that's all a matter



Evening of the same day he faced a farm supper with the feeling that a square meal is the biggest thing in life.