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Advertise in the Advocate

Fiddler.

Having been the owner of Fiddler for almost two weeks, Mr. Hiram Proggins arrived somewhat abruptly at the conclusion that he had made a mistake. Either Fiddler was not the horse for him or he was not the man for Fiddler. From his perch on the grain-box, Mr. Proggins stared in dissatisfied contemplation at the stall where Fiddler's white nose was submerged in the manger. Yes, a mistake had been made.

Fiddler had known it all along. There were horses, plenty of them, that would have suited Hi Proggins. Some horses, you know, won't care a clover-head who owns them. Fiddler was not of this kind. He could make distinctions, and very fine ones, sometimes. The mere sight of Proggins aroused his suspicions, and when Fiddler first felt the touch of the new owner's hands on the reins he was assured by that subtle instinct common to every good horse, that he and Mr. Proggins were not in accord and never could be.

In the first place, Proggins was glum and un-social. Fiddler's chief traits were cheerfulness and sociability. Also, he had that which many scientific folks will tell you no animal possesses—a sense of humor. Judging him by a full-face view, you would never guess it. Fiddler had a long head—an abnormally long head—which gave to his frontal expression a solemn, almost lugubrious cast. Perhaps no horse ever carried about such a doleful face. It was grotesquely woe-gone.

But view him from either side, get the effect of his drooping eyelids, the merry drollery lurking in the mouth corners, the mischievous twitching of his pendent upper lip, and you would find yourself grinning out of sheer sympathy with his jovial mood.

Mr. Proggins, however, did not grin. He never grinned. The face of Proggins was not fashioned for such purpose. Mainly it was whiskered—not with a long, benevolent beard, nor with an aristocratic Vandylke. It bristled with a coarse, straggly, untractable, sandy-hued growth that suggested irritability of temper. As for the eyes of Proggins, no one might know what they expressed, for they were deeply set under bushy brows and further hidden by an overgrown pair of smoked glasses. Those glasses puzzled Fiddler, as well they might, for they gave to the unattractive face of Proggins a weird, sinister expression.

This was unfortunate. Proggins was not a bad fellow. He was simply an unsuccessful inventor, whose disposition had been somewhat soured. Chiefly this was due to misdirected effort, for Proggins had inventive genius of no mean order. But he misused it. Was there anything along impossible or impractical lines, Proggins thought of it and straightway set himself the task of inventing it. He invented a mattress that would turn itself over once in ten days, provided that you wound up the weights and set the clockwork properly. The fact that the great American public did not yearn for a self-turning mattress embittered the mind of Proggins. A lawn-mower that could be converted into a feed-cutting, a hand-cultivator, a churn, or a coffee-grinder was another ingenious boon that the public declined to appreciate.

The two or three inventions which had proved of real value brought him meagre returns because manufacturers' agents had juggled the patent rights to that end. But always and endlessly, despite failure and reverses, were Proggins's best thoughts, most of his income and the greater part of his time devoted to the construction of a perpetual-motion machine, which seemed doomed to be perpetually motionless.

It was this unoriginal folly that had estranged kin and friends, that had caused Proggins to leave town and seek the seclusion of a ten-acre farm off the County House Road. There, in unpainted, ramshackle buildings huddled among unpruned trees and surrounded by untended fields, Proggins lived like a hermit, working at vain things, dreaming vain dreams, and cherishing resentment against a careless world.

About once a week, Proggins reluctantly tramped into the nearest town for supplies and material. With the purpose of making these trips still more infrequent, he decided to buy a horse. Unluckily for both, Fiddler chanced to be

the animal which fate and an unsympathetic horse dealer picked out to share his lot.

When you have pulled a post-cart over a suburban mail route for some five years, you come to know a lot of folks, and a lot of folks come to know you. When you are watched for every day by several hundred persons, when you establish intimate relations with a whole neighborhood, then your work ceases to be mere drudgery. Fiddler had found it so. He liked to see them, the women and children, and sometimes the men, standing at the gate watching for him. They seemed glad to have him stop, even though he left nothing more than the weekly paper or a patent-medicine almanac. They brought him things to eat—bunches of clover whose honey-laden tops were deliciously sweet, red summer apples, and, on baking days, fresh crullers and ginger cookies. He liked his driver, too—a jolly chap who whistled and sang as Fiddler jogged along the highway.

Changes, however, are bound to come. The driver was promoted to the railway division, and the new postman had a horse of his own. So Fiddler went to the horse-trader, and from there to the Proggins farm. Sadly did Fiddler miss his friends on the mail route. Here was only this glum-visaged man with bristling whiskers and queer-looking eyes. He neither looked nor acted friendly. But Fiddler was bound to make the best of things. In a dozen ways he tried to be sociable. He had a trick of upsetting the grain measure by an unexpected lift of his long nose when he was being fed. The postman had enjoyed it heartily, and every meal-time they made quite a game of it. But Proggins rapped him sharply with a stick he carried, and refused to enter into the spirit of the joke. He wanted none of Fiddler's good-natured nosings, and plainly showed it.

It was clear, too, that he was afraid of the horse, approaching head or heels with much caution. Fiddler, who had never kicked or used his teeth on anyone in all his life, came to enjoy lifting a threatening hoof or laying back his ears, just for the fun of seeing Mr. Proggins dance out of his way.

What was the matter with the man, anyway? Fiddler could not make out. Then there remained the mystery of those smoked glasses. So Fiddler got into the habit of watching his master closely as long as he could keep Proggins within range of his eyes. His were big, round eyes, too, deep and full and strikingly human in their expression. Fiddler could stare out of them in such a questioning way that one was almost moved to ask, "Well, old fellow, what's up; what do you want to say?"

Hi Proggins was not so moved. To him this stare of Fiddler's was intensely disconcerting. Whenever he was at work about the barn he might be certain that those big, round eyes were following him. Fiddler would even crane his neck to watch Proggins shake out the bedding or when he was fastening the traces behind him. This Mr. Proggins interpreted as an evidence that the horse was only waiting for a chance to play him some evil prank. Naturally he grew to dislike Fiddler as well as to fear him.

Once he had Fiddler safely harnessed and had climbed up on the wagon out of range of his blinded eyes, Mr. Proggins's mind was at peace. Sitting humped over on the seat, his thoughts dwelling on some new obstacle presented by the intricate contrivance in his workshop, Proggins would allow Fiddler to jog along wholly unguided for half an hour at a time.

Then it was that Fiddler tasted happiness. Hungry for the sight of horses and men, he improved each trip to town by giving full play to his sociable impulses. He whinnied friendly greetings to every passing team, and often left the road altogether just to rub noses with a pastured horse. Could he overtake a carriage, he would follow it doggedly, if possible with nose on the seat-back. In this way he frightened several old ladies, who roused the absent-minded Proggins from his day dreams to scold him soundly for his impertinence.

Arrived in town, it was Fiddler's delight to stop before the court house or town hall, or wherever was the biggest crowd, much to the disgust of Proggins, who wished to come in contact with as few persons as possible.

But Fiddler was bent on being

(Continued on next page.)

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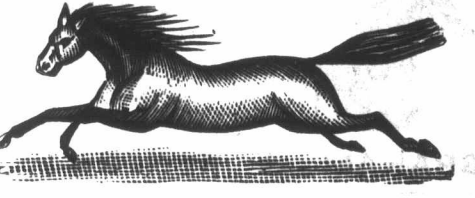
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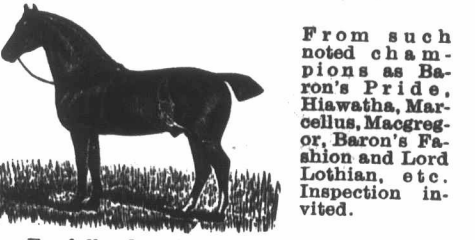
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