

A SKETCH.



YES, my hands are a little broad—caused by the fork, I fancy. I used to like pitching; there seemed to be something manly in it, you see. One feels strong when pitching, and one breathes pure air—the sense of power (and it's all one whether you are dealing with a gun or a horse, a woman or an audience) and the feelings of health.

At threshings I used to drop the sheaves on the table. You know how it is done—tops first, close to the feeder, one at a time. No piling sheaves on the table, no butts foremost, no hitting the feeder.

One day at Henderson's, Davie Forsyth was feeding. Davie was a good feeder—strong and steady. But a flying sheaf knocked him off his balance, and his arm went into the cylinder. There was no groaning—not even when the doctor was at work. Davie had good grit. I think he is peddling fruit trees now. Who threw the sheaf? It doesn't make any difference. Probably he knows himself; probably he has made himself believe that it wasn't his sheaf that did it. Carelessness? Of course it was carelessness. But carelessness in dropping sheaves on the table of a threshing machine is a sin. I could pitch well—better than any one in the neighborhood. I sometimes thought that I was a wonderful pitcher—that I had something of a divine gift. I felt that I was under a greater responsibility than other men because I was more richly endowed. I felt that more would be expected of me since it had been granted unto me to pitch well. After a hard day's work I used to feel that I was an ideal pitcher, and many a time have I fallen asleep wondering how an ideal pitcher should live. And yet I was modest—for always, even in a dream, the consciousness of my greatness was always accompanied by a flush. I didn't like men to praise my pitching. It seemed so unnecessary.

One morning after breakfast—it will be seven years come next September—I went out to get my fork. (There was to be a threshing at Berdan's, and he had sent over for a hand.) It was only a fork—a two-tine, they call it—and a fool would say it was just like any other fork. But do you think that it would thrill me through and through to touch any other fork? One fork does look like another if one hasn't the gift of discernment; but every ideal pitcher has an ideal fork, and that fork was my ideal. How I loved that fork—the curved beauty of those tines, the polish and finish of that handle—its charming individuality, its sweet presence, its power! Blushing, I bore it along; my fork and I were one, the world was bright, and we had a mission to perform—pitching.

Half of the men in the neighborhood were at Berdan's. He had twice as many hands as were needed. Just think—ten men in the mow. To be sure the mow was a big one, twice the ordinary size, and the sheaves were dumped in with slings; but I never could understand why Berdan always wanted to put ten men in that mow. When the men lined up I noticed that no one seemed anxious to take the place next the table, but that did not make any difference, for of course that was my place. That place was reserved for the ideal pitcher and men felt that I was the ideal pitcher. I was touched by this silent recognition of my gift. I expected of course that another man would offer to help me, and I intended to accept the offer; not that I needed any assistance, not that he would be in any way equal to me as a pitcher, but simply in order that the gift might stand out more conspicuously when the ideal pitcher was working beside an ordinary man.

If I had any thought of asking for a partner (for something, I knew not what, a momentary weakness, a want of confidence in the gift, came over me)—if there was anything of this kind it vanished when I saw No. 2 silently motion his partner away and take his stand beside me, alone.

Poor No. 2! I had never seen him before, But he

seemed like a fine fellow, tall and strong, and lithe and wiry, and now that I remember it he had a square cut jaw. It made me feel sorry to see such a man tempting fate. Did he think he could take sheaves from eight men? But when will men realize that there are some things which mere humanity unaided by any gift cannot possibly do. But probably he had never been at a threshing before—had never seen an ideal pitcher.

The whistle blew, the great belt flapped lazily twice and then started, the cylinder began its long complaint and the first sheaf bounced heavily on the table.

There is a certain harmony in a threshing properly conducted, an intricate rhythm, a sweet and subtle music, a divine harmony of sound and movement which an ideal pitcher must recognize. Never before had I caught the melody so clearly, never before had the highest part of myself reached the highest perfection of itself, but now everything seemed in unison, the ideal had been attained in an ideal way and amid ideal surroundings. My pulse was at one with my gift.

For two hours I lived the ideal life. Then if ever before I felt the full heat of the divine fire. I had forgotten No. 2, I had forgotten the mere men around me. My eyes were turned inward on my gift. The glowing intensity of my realization of the ideal almost blinded me. It did blind me. It must have blinded me else what was that extra sheaf doing there? When did No. 2 throw that extra sheaf. It is a delusion. There is no sheaf there, and yet there it lies looking calmly up at me, and pitch as hard as I like I can't remove that extra sheaf. Was it possible that No. 2 had pitched two sheaves while I was pitching one—and then I remembered that for three hours No. 2 had been sending in the sheaves as quickly as I could take them away. But then it often happens that mere humanity seems for a time to keep pace with a man with a gift. What is that? Two extra sheaves! three! four! Surely I hadn't been giving the gift a chance. Now let the gift face outwards and no longer contemplate itself. For an hour the harmony was perfect, the gift had righted itself and I had almost cleared away the little pile at my feet, and then, I knew not how, it began to rise again, ten sheaves, twelve sheaves. Could it be that No. 2 had a gift? And then I did a weak thing. I tried to imitate No. 2. I thought that by adopting some of his expedients for turning a sheaf deftly I could come to the assistance of my gift. I tried to piece out the divine by the human. Sixteen sheaves, twenty sheaves, thirty and then just as I was giving up the count the whistle blew, and as the men filed in to dinner they passed the little mound of sheaves under which lay buried my belief in my gift. The divine in me was lost the moment I began to imitate.

At dinner I heard the man with a square cut jaw saying, "That young fellow pitches well, but he would find he would pitch faster if he didn't put his fork in straddle of the band." And in the afternoon I found myself following his directions.

Since then my fork has been much the same as any fellow's fork, a black ash handle with prongs of steel, and my gift has been anybody's gift—strong muscles, good lungs, quickness of eye and hand—but the pitcher's ideal has vanished from the earth. X.

PROHIBITION.

He went into the drug store,
He was so very dry,
And as he called for lemon
He winked the other eye.

A PASTORAL.

"Where are you going, my little man,
With pail of chalk and bright tin pan?"
"I'm going to the brook amid the glade,
I'm going a milking, sir," he said.