

# The Broad Highway

Jeffery Farnol

"Which We Call Life"

(Continued from yesterday.)  
Now hereupon, with a sudden gesture, I pitched my staff out through the open doorway into the road, and folded my arms across my chest, even as he.

"Why did 'ee do that?" he inquired, staring.

"Because I don't think I shall need it, after all."

"But suppose I was to come for 'ee now?"

"But you won't."

"You'll be a strange sort o' chap!" said he, shaking his head.

"So they tell me."

"And what does the likes o' you want w' the likes of me?"

"Work!"

"Know anythin' about smitthin'?"

"Not a thing."

"Then why do 'ee come 'ere?"

"To learn."

"More fool you!" said the smith.

"Why?"

"Because smitthin' is 'ard work, and dirt work, and hot work, and work as is 'eady paid nowadays."

"Then why are you a smith?"

"My father was a smith afore me."

"And is that your only reason?"

"My only reason."

"Then you are the greater fool."

"You think so, do ye?"

"Certainly."

"Supposin'," said Black George, stroking his golden beard reflectively, "supposin' I was to get up and break your neck for that?"

"Then you would, at least, save me from the folly of becoming a smith."

"I don't," said Black George, shaking his head, "no, I do not like you."

"I am sorry for that."

"Because," he went on, "you've got the gift of the gab, and a gabbing man is worse than a gabbing woman."

"You can gab your share, if it comes to that," said I.

"Can I?"

"You can."

"My chap," he growled, holding up a warning hand, "so easy now, so easy; don't get me took again."

"Not if I can help it," I returned.

"I be a quiet soul till I gets took—very quiet soul—lamba bein' quieter, but I'll give 'ee a good trouncin' o' yours if I do get took—so look out!"

"I understand you have an important piece of work on hand," said I, changing the subject.

"Th' owd church screen, yes."

"And are in need of a hammer?"

"Ah! to be sure—but you aren't got the look of a workin' man. I expect see a workin' 'ove w' 'ands the like o' yours, so white as a woman's be."

"I have worked hard enough in my time, nevertheless," said I.

"What might you 'ave done, now?"

"I have translated Petronius Arbitrius into the English of the Members of the Sleur de Bractemans."

"Oh," exclaimed the smith, "that sounds a lot! anything more?"

"Yes," I answered; "I won the High Jump, and Throwing the Hammer."

"Throvin' th' 'ammir!" repeated Black George musingly; "was it anything like that there? And he pointin' to a sledge near by."

"Something," I answered.

"And you want work?"

"I do."

"Tall 'ee what, my fellow, if you can throw that there 'ammir further nor me, then I'll say, 'Done,' and you can name your own wages, but if I beat you, and I'm fairer I can, then you must stand up to me for ten minutes, and I'll give 'ee a good trouncin' to ease my mind—what d'ye say?"

After a momentary hesitation, I nodded my head.

"Done!" said I.

"More fool you!" grinned the smith, and, catching up his sledge-hammer, he strode out into the road.

Before "The Bull" a small crowd had gathered, and a newly come from before or farmyard, for most of them carried rake or pitchfork, having doubtless been drawn thither by the hellish outcry of Black George and my self. Now I noticed that while they listened to the Ancient, who was holding forth, snuff-box in hand, yet every eye was turned towards the smithy, and in every eye was expectation, at our appearance, however, I thought they seemed, one and all, vastly surprised and taken aback, for heads were shaken, and glances wandered from the smith and myself to the Ancient, and back again.

"Well, I'll be danged!" exclaimed Job.

"I knowed it! I knowed it!" cried the Ancient, rubbing his hands and chucking.

"Knowed what, Gaffer?" inquired Black George, as we came up.

"Why, I knowed as this young chap would come out a-walkin' 'om his own two legs, and not like Job, a-rollin' and a-wallerin' in the dust o' th' road—like a hog."

"Why, y' see, Gaffer," began the smith, almost apologetically, "it seemed to me, 'it do come sort o' nat'ral to have the likes o' Job about a bit—'Job's made for it, y' might say, but this chap is different."

"So 'e be, Jarge—so 'e be!" nodded the Ancient.

"Though, mark me, Gaffer, I am not nallow in love w' this chap neither—'e gabs too much to suit me, by a long sight!"

"'E do that!" chimed in 'ob, edging nearer; "what I see is, if 'e do get his back broke, 'e are n't got nobody to blame but 'isself—so cocksure as 'e be."

"Job," said the Ancient, "hold thee tongue."

"I see 'e 's a cocksure 'ove," repeated Job doggedly; "an' a cocksure 'ove, 'e be, what do 'ee think, Jarge?"

"Job," returned the smith, "I don't chuck a man into 'ob and talk w' 'im both in the same day."

In this conversation I bore no part, busy as myself in drawing out a wide

circle in the fast, a proceeding watched by the others with much interest, and not a few wondrous comments.

"What he gets to do w' hammer, Jarge?" inquired the Ancient.

"Why," explained the smith, "this chap thinks 'e can throw it further nor me."

"If 'e do be 'e can," pursued Black George, "then 'e comes to work for me at 'is own price, but if I beat 'im, then 'e must stand up to me w' 'is fists for ten minutes."

"Ten minutes?" cried a voice; "'e won't last five—see if 'e do."

"Feel sorry for un," said a second, "'e do be so pale as a sheet a'eady."

"So would you be if you was in 'is shoes!" chimed in a third; "whereat there was a general laugh.

Indeed, as I looked round the ring of grinning, unresponsive faces, it was 'all to see that all sympathy was against the stranger, as in the way of bird, beast, fish, but especially man, the world over—and I experienced a sudden sense of loneliness which was, I think, only natural. Yet, as I put up my hand to loose the strap of my knapsack, I encountered another 'eady there, and, turning, beheld Simon the Innkeeper.

"Many thanks for your friendly advice," said I, with a grateful nod and, slipping off my coat, would have handed it to him but that the Ancient hopped up, and, taking it from me, folded it ostentatiously across his arm.

"Mark my words, Simon," said he, "this young chap is as like what I am here at his age as one pea is to another—I say so, and I means so."

"Come," said Black George, at this juncture, "I've work waitin' to be done, and my forge fire will be out."

"I'm quite ready," said I, stepping forward. It was now arranged that, standing alternately in the circle, we should each have three throvcings—whoever should make the two best throvcings to win.

Hereupon, the smith took his place within the circle, hammer in hand.

"Wait," said I, "the advantage usually lies with the last thrower. It would be fairer to you were we to toss for it."

"No," answered Black George, motioning the onlookers to stand back, "I've got th' 'ammir, and I'll throw first."

Now, as probably every one knows, it is one thing to swing a sledge-hammer in the ordinary way but quite another to throw it any distance, for there is required beside the bodily strength, a certain amount of knowledge, without which a man is necessarily handicapped. Thus, despite my opponent's great strength of arm, I was fairly sanguine of the result.

Black George took a fresh grip upon the hammer-shaft, twirled it lightly above his head, swung it once, twice, three—and let it go.

With a shout, Job and two or three others ran down the road to mark where it had fallen, and presently returned, pacing out the distance.

"Fifty-nine!" they announced.

"Can 'ee beat that?" inquired Black George complacently.

"I think I can," I answered, as, taking up the hammer, I, in turn, stepped into the ring. Gripping the shaft firmly, I whirled it aloft, and began to swing it swifter and swifter, gaining greater impetus every moment, till, like a flash, it flew from my grasp.

Fanting, I watched it rise, rise, rise, and then plunge down to earth in a smother of dust.

"'E've beat it!" cried the Ancient, flourishing his stick excitedly. "Lord love me, 'e 've beat it!"

"Ay, 'e 've beat it, surely!" said a man who carried a rake that was forever getting in everybody's way.

"An' by a goodish bit!" shouted another.

"Ah! but Jarge are n't got 'is arm in 'is yet," retorted a third; "Jarge can't do it."

Job, who had been standing in the background, now stepped forward, and, holding forth a small tray, said, "I've got th' 'ammir, and I'll throw first."

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To the next of kin and creditors of Hannah Lynch, late of the City of Saint John in the County of County of Saint John, widow, deceased, and all others whom it may concern.  
The administratrix of the above deceased intestate, having filed her accounts in this Court, and asked to have the same passed and allowed and for distribution made, you are hereby cited to attend, if you so desire, at the hearing of this Court of Probate to be held in and for the City and County of Saint John, at the Probate Court Room, in the Pugsley Building, in the City of Saint John, on Monday, the twenty-seventh day of March next, at the hour of eleven o'clock in the forenoon, when the said accounts will be passed upon, and order for distribution made.  
Given under my hand this twenty-ninth day of February, A. D. 1916.  
(Sgd.) E. T. C. Knowles, Judge of Probate.  
(Sgd.) H. O. McInerney, Registrar of Probate.

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PUBLIC NOTICE IS HEREBY given that a Bill has been presented for enactment at the present Session of the Provincial Legislature intituled "An Act for the further amendment of the laws relating to the City of Saint John, and contains and is a consolidation of the several Bills hereinafter set forth, all of which have been published four successive weeks in a public newspaper in the City of Saint John, as required by the rules of the House, that is to say:—  
(1) Bill, intituled "An Act relating to the salary of the Chief of Police of Saint John."  
(2) Bill, intituled "An Act in further amendment of the Saint John City Assessment Act, 1909."  
(3) Bill, intituled "An Act in further amendment of the Saint John City Assessment Act, 1909."  
Dated at the City of Saint John, N. B., the sixteenth day of March, A. D. 1916.  
HERBERT E. WARDROPER, Common Clerk.

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