

most of the monkey work, because Reuben could not trust his moral balance on a ladder or a limb. And of all the jobs I ever had from Reuben, that of picking apples was the one I most hated. When the packers left about a hundred barrels of good apples on our hands as culls to feed the hogs I said unto him:

"Mr. Sparks, I wish some archangel would come down here to sort over mankind. I'll eat my shirt if he wouldn't chuck those packers out among the culls."

THE look the man gave me would have soured a pail of milk fresh from the cow. He puckered up his lips and talked back as though he had been some sort of junior demigod, saying:

"Jacob, you should go on to your knees before your Maker and take that back."

"I'll do no sich a thing," I countered ungrammatically. "Them packers done you out of a heap of good apples and they oughta be exposed in a newspaper."

He turned on his No. 10 heel and left me, and I knew that he would never forgive me for that sacrilege until he knew that I had confessed my sin, which I determined never to do. So I said to Barney, the bull, in the barnyard when the rest of the cattle were down to chewing cud round the new strawstack:

"Barney," says I, "the man that raised you has missed his calling. He should have been head of a reformatory."

Barney boomed and scraped up a little dust. I saw that he agreed. We were a pair of mutual sinners.

"Remember," said I, "you belong to me now. I've paid for you spot cash and your pasture fees come out o' my wages."

He wobbled his head in the dusk, seeming to understand that he and I were in league against the just person who had raised him. With the solemnity of a covenant I instructed him to eat all he could of the just man's third-crop clover and his pumpkins.

"Because," said I, "you're a good enough critter to show at the Jericho fair, and I got my mind made up to enter you. If I do, you got no business carrying anything away except the red ticket."

I had absolute faith in the ability of Reuben Sparks to raise prize-taking critters, although for two years he had not shown any and had no intention of so doing this year. Did Reuben Sparks suspect the pact that Barney and I had made against him? I knew not.

Sparks never found us conventicling at the strawstack. And I for one had no desire for any unpleasantness while we both sojourned with the just man.

OF this, however, I was morally certain: Sparks had never begun to fathom the depth of my economic dreams about Barney the bull. Had he ever been more genial to me than a file is to a cross-cut saw, I should have let my admiration get the better of me and confess that in Barney I saw the possibility of my becoming as good a farmer as Reuben Sparks. Barney was the first tangible asset I ever had outside my clothes. I intended to swap him off the next year for a first-class cow, from whom in the process of time I could raise one calf, selling cow and calf for money enough to buy a good two-year-old colt, which would be the most convenient kind of animal to take around with me to various hiring-out jobs, and which by the time I had raked up enough cash to consider renting a farm might develop into enough tangible assets to buy half my implements and machinery.

That was a dream for which I pardoned myself in spite of all its extravaganzas. I had to have faith in something. I preferred for the present to stake it all on Barney the bull.

"And if you don't come off with the red ticket, Barnabas," said I to him, whenever we met the week before the Jericho fair, "you'll miss my great chance of succeeding in this life."

He seemed to comprehend that, because he dug into the just man's third crop of clover and his

succulent pumpkins with the voracity of a man-eating shark. I knew that whatever minor defects there might be in his anatomy a good coat of fat would cover them up. If he ever got any ingrained dirt in his hair I carefully took it out with a currycomb in the obscurity of the strawstack after dark. I raked out of him all the old hair, brushed him up till he shone in the sun like the golden calf did to the children of Israel, and by the time Sparks began to talk about going to Jericho fair Barney was a picture of perfect health, good breeding and prosperity.

"I hear y've entered him at the fair," says Reuben to me.

"I hev," was the somewhat humble reply.

"Hmh!" he subtracted.

Now, what all did that mean—"hmh!"? Never a word of congratulation that any hired person of his had gumption enough to rise far enough above the common herd to act as a property-owner in competition with the labourhood of Jericho; never a syllable of gladness that I had expressed my abounding faith in Reuben Sparks' virtuosity as a cattle-breeder. Nothing but that disgruntling "hmh!"

From that time on to the day of the fair Reuben said neither ay, yes or no to me about Barney the bull. He said, however, that of course I would have the day off to go to the fair and that he was going himself—which he always did, never missing a chance to appear among the Jericholanders as a fine example of the man diligent in business, fit to stand before kings—one of his five local-preacher texts.

Morning of the fair I was up and out before anybody else; and by the time I got to the stack, just at the peep of dawn, Barney was still

running. That seemed sacrilegious. Such a fair as it would be on such a day of the Lord! Jericho was a pageant. The corner-store at the cross-roads seemed like the meeting-place of immortals. The squatty little houses gleamed as though they had eyes. On all the roads the dust-clouds of people and animals and things in general coming to the fair always held in a timothy meadow next to the cheese factory with a race track oval in the midst, the crystal palace as big as a small hay-barn on one side, and the campus between beginning to cram itself full of wonders of the world.

I SUPPOSE I was seeing double. Everything was in a glorified blur; beasts and men and machinery, pumpkins, potatoes and patchwork quilts. A self-binder as large as a small circus calliope, cavorted about behind three horses tying up little make-believe bundles of straw. Barney, the bull, seemed a small matter now compared to the tricked-up threshing machines and the new red fanning-mills, that looked as though they might turn their own cranks, the patent hayforks that were just beginning to reduce the demand for hired persons, the plows that had more kinds of mouldboards and beams and cutters than ships have sails and rigs, the popcorn and watermelon booths that made me think of other worlds than ours, the thimble-rig and wheel of fortune artists that I knew were never tolerated in the

days when Reuben Sparks was a director of the Jericho Agricultural Association. The world was changing fast. I felt myself uplifted at the idea even while I shared in the desire for a little idolatry and wickedness.

And by mid-afternoon Jericho was full enough of togged-up people to have held a camp-meeting. No matter how lean and hardscrabble most of the farms in the

land of Jericho, here at least we had on our best bibs and tuckers and our very best goods in the show windows.

Among whom and which was Barney the bull. Also other two-year-olds who would give him a tight race; which made me nervous to find out who the judges might be.

When I discovered that Reuben Sparks the just man was one of them I had a sudden desire to take Barney away to the bush and have a conventicle. Reuben had said never a word to me about this. At first I felt dizzy and discouraged. Then I came to myself—as most people do. Tickling my ears with the ends of a chunk of water-melon, I said that Reuben

Sparks never could fail to give first prize to Barney. He knew the breed, the care, the moral effort of both Barney and myself, the stake we had in this thing, and probably suspected my whole desire to succeed in becoming a good farmer like unto R. Sparks. He also knew that to give Barney the red ticket meant a further boost to his own reputation as a stock-raiser. The occasion was ripe. I had a friend among the judges, whose sense of justice would force him to give the prize to Barney, because of a survey of all the facts. On a matter of mere points, perhaps Barney was no better than two of the others. On a basis of moral purpose and personal care he was in a class all by himself.

I WAS so nervous about this that before the afternoon was over I went out of the grounds and down to the corners of the deserted village. From there the racket of the fair seemed like one of the voices of nature, as fine as a waterfall or the wind in a forest. And I could recognize the male alto bawling of Barney the bull.

Then I went back. In a kind of delirium I drifted among the crowd, seeing nobody clearly, hearing the voices all in a jumble, sidling over presently to the part of the cattle ring where Barney stood. I didn't let on to myself or anybody else that I was the least bit anxious. I didn't know whether Reuben Sparks was anywhere near me or not. The cattle were all a lot of red and black and white dots to me. Barney, white and black, loomed up bigger than any of them. I didn't look square at him, because he might see

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