

HERMIT THRUSH SINGS 13

The man in the field leaned his bare, brown arms on the top of the fence-rails and surveyed his friend with an indulgent smile.

"I'm afraid he's closer than that to most of us already, Martin," he said, shaking his head. "Don't you worry about Joe Symonds. Why, we were boys at school together. There's no harm in him."

The younger man looked at his friend with mingled admiration and impatience in his eyes. "Lookie here, John, you're far too easy. You take a warning in time, and don't let that sneak get his claws any further into your wool than you can help. I'd shut off every bit of dealings with him. He's as sharp as a weasel. Don't you forget that he's got a hold on you already."

"Tuts! That's nothing. I'll pay that next fall, if the crops turn out only half as well as they look now."

The other shook his head. "John McIntyre," he said, with affectionate severity, "you're too honest for this world. Symonds belongs to a crooked stock. His father before him was crooked, and his grandfather was crookeder, and he's the crookedest o' the whole bunch. I—I"—he hesitated, boyishly—"I hate to go away thinkin' he's livin' next farm to you—that's all."