

checked shirt was open at the neck like dad's. His overalls were blue and faded like dad's. He was a man of affairs. Dad and he intended breaking another hundred acres for wheat. Their oats last year run a hundred and ten bushels to the acre. They must sow more this season. Besides, with all these weighty matters, he had his diversions, his pleasures. For one thing he was helping to "break in" the yoke of big white steers they had brought west with them. For another he was in love with the sweet faced little spinster that taught the school. Her name was Smith. Sally Smith, in full. He had seen it in the first page of the story book loaned him and thought it a sensible name, a nice common name. Her voice was so soft and warm—yes, warm was the word—and her eyes so big and brown and kind, that nobody could help loving her. Yet she could be stern. The boy called to mind his first day at school, the shyness which choked him when the whole school broke into titters over his absurd name. She had spoken sternly then, and later had soothed his ruffled feelings by sitting beside him during recess. She was partial to the name of Algernon she said, and, marking the caressing way she pronounced it, he was fain to believe her. She knew an Algernon when she was a young girl, she told him. The curiosity of a boy of ten is abnormal.

"Was he your beau?" he inquired, diffidently.

"It was so long ago I can't remember," she answered with a laugh.

Of course that other Algernon had loved her. He knew what he would do when he was a man. He would have a farm like dad's, and she should keep his house. He would hold her hand like dad held mother's, carry all the heavy pails like dad did, tease her till she was cross and kiss her till she laughed, just as dad did. As for loving and letting go, it was not in his creed. That other Algernon had been a poor affair.

Things did not go well with the Hopgoods that second spring on the homestead. Algernon Emmerson, with trouble in his loyal little heart, and his dad's fountain pen in hand, wrote to uncle. A part of the much blotted letter ran as follows:

"We've lost a horse and I can't do much with the oxen on account of old Buck being the meanest ox ever. How are you on oxen? Dad's awe-full used up with cut on his foot fixing a steak in bridge its up to us to Bukle in and get the plowing done so as your the family wait no time, get a move on. If you don't come my name's Algernon Emmerson no More but Joe."

A letter addressed to his uncle in his mother's fine hand was lying on the table unsealed. He folded his important missive, inserted it, and ran out to the cross-roads to wait for the mail man.

Exactly eight days later came the answer in the shape of an exceedingly well-dressed man, tall, stooped, almost good-looking.

"My brother of all people!" cried the astonished and delighted Sarah as she sought her good man's side. "He has come to help with the work, he says."

"A lot of work he can do! He's played invalid for more than ten years," returned Billy sceptically.

"Played is the word; he's a hypochondriac, pure and simple."

"I wouldn't call him names," laughed Billy, adding hopefully that maybe the visit would be a short one. Right here Sarah made a remark which was often referred to in later times.

"I have the feeling," she said, "that the West will do a lot for him."

The West, assisted by Algernon E., began the good work at once. It got uncle up to breakfast; better still, it gave him an appetite for breakfast; it lured uncle out to contemplate the fields awaiting the plow; it woke up something in him, made him wish he were strong enough to work. Dear me! but no use to grow impatient with his invalidism at this late day. What does Whittier say?

"Who may not strive may yet fulfil the harder task of standing still."

The glow of new dawn on a new world was wonderful, was awakening. The wild west wind, with its freight of April sweetness, called to him, laughed at him. What had his namesake

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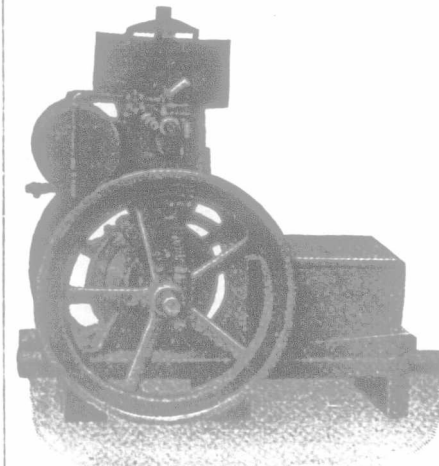
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written: "Its up to us to Bukle in." Just so.

Guiding a plow was bad enough, but guiding a plow attached to a yoke of steers—and such steers—well, it was no work for a man with chronic congestion of the liver. He had to neglect his liver. There was not time during the day to dwell on symptoms, remedies, etc., and at night he was too tired. Yet there was something taking about it all. Algernon E. was his shadow. Up till the day the steers defied the authority of their mild-voiced driver, ran away across the marsh and meadow, and were run after, caught, well thrashed, and hard worked by this same mild-voiced uncle, Algernon E. had his doubts. After that he pinned his faith to uncle.

"Farming's the most satisfying work of all." Uncle had been a month at the homestead now, and spoke with authority. "You see the results as you go along. Looking at a field when it's nicely furrowed and later on when the grain sprouts soft and green, one can't grudge the labor spent on it." Algernon E., busy picking thistles from the sole of a dirty foot, opined that farming was all right when frosts and hailstorms kept away.

"The only thing I dislike is the way the soil sticks," went on uncle. "If one had a bath tub, and—"

"Our last hired man washed in the creek," broke in the boy. "It's jolly. I'd go in every night, but ma won't let me go alone. Let's try it, uncle."

"I've been used to tepid baths," doubtfully. "A cold plunge might use me up—still, I'm feeling better."

"Say," with unstudied artfulness, "you look like a boy. I'd offer to race you to the creek, but I ain't forgot how your long legs flew the day you took after the steers."

"I'll give you five yards start," uncle was beginning. "One, two, three, and away!" After that the race to the creek and the cold plunge became a regular feature of the day. That was a great summer. The sunshine stole the sallowness from uncle's face and left a good healthy brown in its stead. He was the busiest man in the whole neighborhood.

"It's a caution," said the astonished Billy, who was now back in harness; "he can work wheels 'round me. A nice invalid he is!"

"He had a bad illness once," explained Sarah. "Ma told him he'd never be strong again, the family doctor backed her up, and between 'em they made him believe it. He had plenty of money, didn't need to work, and took kindly to invalidism."

"P'raps that girl turning him down the way she did—"

"That was just a yarn," she broke in. "He wasn't the kind of a chap to get turned down. Ma used to say there wasn't anybody good enough for her boy."

"She used to say the same about her girl." He laughed, then added: "Anyway, the West is making a man of him."

June brought the highway roses, the fields of timothy and clover, the pale green of growing oats, and the deeper green of growing wheat. July brought skies rosy with heat, wind languid with it, brought holidays, brought the little schoolmarm.

"Algernon Emmerson will be tickled," said the delighted Sarah. "He thinks the sun rises and sets on his Miss Smith. He's back of the house helping uncle get some chickens in a coop; you go out and surprise him."

"Look here," uncle was saying, "this hen is tired tending this brood. She'd like to get out of looking after their eating, sleeping and all the rest of it. Wants to jung her job."

"Oh, go on," came Algernon Emmerson's matter-of-fact tones; "what business has a hen shirking. Shoo her in."

"Wait, don't hustle the poor thing. She put out her head on one side and looked at me as wise as a human. How am I going to look after this whole raft of cheeping chickens?" was what she meant.

"She ought to be 'shamed of herself, that's all," grumbled the boy, "since she hatched 'em out she—that's the wrong hen, uncle. No wonder she won't go in the coop. The mother of the chicks is that one with feathers on her legs and a ragged topnot."

(Continued on page 1360.)