

(Continued from page 19).

Smikes thought. He thought other things, too, when the stranger opened up:

"I've been looking after the handling of van, number 2114, arriving and leaving here. It was broken in the Nemegutch pitch-in, but was brought in here with other damaged equipment. She arrived with complete furnishings, and left last night with a stove, two pairs blankets, a van chair, two lanterns, several cooking utensils and a small cupboard missing. Where are they?"

The suddenness of the question startled Smikes, but he lost none of his placidity. He assured Mr. Special Service man that his business was hoisting coal, not searching for lost equipment.

"Come now," insisted the Special Service man, "take me down to the Italians' shack and let me look through it. Don't think I'd put this up to you if I hadn't seen your men bringing the goods across the tracks to their car."

The car was searched, but it was just as the Head had seen it. The special service man was non-plussed. "Those Italians are wily villains," he commented. "You'd better stay here while I go and get a statement from them. I've got an interpreter coming in a few minutes."

Smikes sat down to the long table when the other had gone and wrote a letter to the Head:

"Dear Sir: The Special Service department sent a man up to find a box car that was here last winter. Special Service men are necessary in a big concern like this. Other things are necessary, too. You'll excuse me for making a story of this, but you must decide when you have read it whether you fire me or put the saving I have effected in hoisting coal against the price of a box car and a few other things, and let me prove that it can be done just as easily on the square."

"I've traveled some; been a mite in and out of this Big Cheese, and paid my way. But my failing seems to be a liking for novelty. Now, hoisting coal is as fascinating as whitewashing birch trees. The job needs a little charm infused into it. This is best understood by the Italian element. I stuck on that euphonious word, economy, and talked it over quietly with my Dago lads. They let me call them Dagos, but they work for me like devils. Now, the first day I hired there was a broken stove in their car. I ordered a new one. I might as well have ordered the Kohinoor out of the royal crown. Outrageous expense, it was called, and a blue line was drawn across the requisition."

"A disabled van came along. It had a good stove in it; it went out with a broken one, and my Dago boys were pleased. They scoured the yards. Short ends of lumber were gathered up until we had enough to line the car and build cupboards. The other improvements were made in the same way. The boys were made comfortable, they were living like decent citizens, and pretty soon I was getting a larger percentage of coal up and having an easier time myself. There was certainly interest infused in the game—but after necessities were accumulated until we could store no more, the habit of acquiring them did not cease. This is the habit I have to break to prove that it is not necessary. I will give you an inventory of what stores I have, and I will requisition for what I need from month to month. If the requisitions are filled you can rely on me to use them honestly—if this confession does not prejudice my case and confirm me a crook. That is for you to decide—I took one means of beating 'economy,' and show you that it pays to keep up supplies, but I am ready for the penalty imposed for acting without authority."

"I have 13 van stoves, 10 van chairs, 6 mattresses, 25 lanterns, 15 pails, 40 shovels, 10 lining bars, 6 spike bars, 15 van lamps, 100 pounds best waste, 50 gallons coal oil, 20 gallons black oil, 6 cables, 5 oil cans and 100 feet of rope."

"These are all necessities. I can get a gallon of oil from the other departments for a chair, and for a stove I can get a cable—just a matter of reciprocity. You see, I can use everything in the company's interest. Why should the contents of a damaged van travel a thousand miles because the car has to go that far

for repairs? That is the principle of these accumulations—making the most of salvage. Should I have told all this to the special service man? He'd have got credit for being smart, and I would lose my job without discussion. I prefer to be fired by the head of this department. You can give authority to have the stores utilized by this department, and it might be just as easy to get the right to have car, number 16548, assigned to this department. The special service man says it's here, and he's right. It's right under car, number 23402, used as a store-room for the various accessories I have catalogued. I had it pulled out of the chute siding no less than six times, and they kept shunting it back—so I buried it."

Smikes, you say, was fired. Not so. Smikes was appointed Fuel Inspector, with jurisdiction over six coaling plants like the one at Haplo. The pilfering has ceased entirely, but the housing arrangements on the other plants are modeled after Haplo's. The six Italians speak and write English well, and each is a foreman at one of the chutes.

Asleep on The Prairie

As dusk steals o'er the prairie, and cool breezes

Sweep through the grass and deep-leaved poplar grove,

And the hour of stillness creeps on tired nature,

I make my bed 'neath Heaven's blue alcove.

I wrap my blanket round me, and my saddle

I place with coat upon it at my head. My broncho browses quietly at his picket;

The last rays of the setting sun shine red.

The fireflies light up their tiny lanterns,

And roistering frogs begin their revelings.

On the hill a lonely coyote bays the moon,

And many sounds arise from many dwellings.

A quietness and yet there is no quiet;

A solitude yet not alone am I.

A deep and awe-inspiring quiet that grips you,

'Neath nature's wild harmonious lullaby.

The perfume of a hundred flowers blows o'er me,

The creek's incessant babbling fills my ears;

And here I lay me down to sleep till morning,

'Neath nature's beauties, calm and free from fears.

E. L. Chicanot, Lacombe, Alta.

On the Branch Line

The trains on the branch road never went very fast. There were various reasons for this, all good ones. Nevertheless, travellers from more populous districts sometimes expressed forcible opinions on the subject. Silas Wetmore, who rode back and forth to and from the junction almost every day, took it upon himself to pacify such as were unduly disturbed by the waits and stops of the little sawed-off string of cars.

One day a particularly irritable passenger sat next him. He not only complained that the train was slow, but wished to know why it was slow.

"What are we stopping for now?" he asked.

Silas looked out the window.

"This is a station," he said, mildly.

"Don't see any," said the other.

"Oh, there isn't any building," said Silas, "but it's a stopping-place."

By and by the train went on. Presently it stopped, apparently in the middle of a field. This time the stranger did not inquire into the reasons for halting. But after another twenty minutes the same thing occurred. Finally he broke out again:

"What we stopping here for? Isn't any station here, is they?"

"No station," said Silas. "We're stopping for water."

"Water!" exclaimed the other. "Water! Why, we just took in water not five minutes ago. What do you mean?"

"Boiler leaks," said Silas, patiently; and the other relapsed into silence.

SMOKE FOREST & STREAM TOBACCO

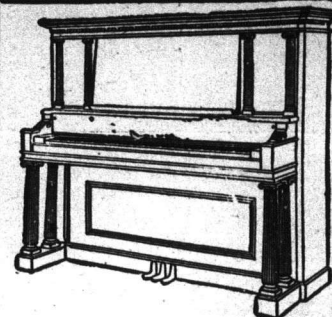
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