

# THE CANADIAN THRESHERMAN AND FARMER

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The "Bohunk" Farmer

1918

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I MET him by the jitney bar of the city's big department store near the noon hour. Wearing a well ventilated suit of overalls and sadly in need of a barber, he didn't look "like ten cents." But I knew that he owned a section of Manitoba, and as a man who owns a section and contents himself with a cheese sandwich and a cup of coffee is not to be trifled with, I spoke to him after the manner of one who at least approaches his equal, most probably his superior in a hundred and one points. Knowing all the risk I took, I even invited him home to lunch or to supper. For the reason that the women folk don't like to offer certain guests the mere gibbets of pot luck, I blew a breath of relief when he declined. "Mercy, no," he answered. "My wife would flay me if she knew I sat down like a bohunk at any decent woman's table."

He would not budge, so I bought him a cigar and we hid ourselves to a seat in the Central Park; one of those democratic benches which are the common property of bohunks, bolsheviks and baronets. I would like to give you his name but he doesn't

advertise. The nearest I can lead you to him is to say that he is George B— of K—, Manitoba, not found on the honor roll of any organization of farming interest, but nevertheless one who in his own way is a more lively wire to the business end of production than many of its more noisy exponents. He was the first man from the West I had met that week who had not a complaint of some sort. Crops looking A.1. Wife and the three girls in the pink of condition. The two boys in France all right—one wounded but "getting on fine."

Knowing the man's enormous capacity for work and for getting others on the move, I "presumed" he had come to the city in search of hired help. But there I was wrong. "No: the youngest boy, (I had forgotten he had another) was coming up to Minto Street Barracks and I took the chance to accompany him; we'll maybe no see him again for a while." Exemption? "Exemption be d—d!" were the exact words that greeted my suggested inquiry; and this from a Presbyterian deacon! His first born volunteered for active service on 25th of August, 1914; his second enlisted as soon as seeding of 1915 was finished, and now the youngest spark of this great fighting stock gets into uniform on the second day following his nineteenth birthday! And there was no complaint or grievance and I never saw a prouder heart gleaming through such a defence work of grime and whiskers.

I have space only for the merest fragment of what information of this man's affairs I dug up in this brief conference. Roughly, these are the main facts: Notwithstanding his contribution to the military necessities of the hour, he had something like 115 acres more land under crop this year than he ever had before, 65 of which was new breaking. He admitted putting in a considerable acreage of night work as the seeding season had been so good and he feared it might break up suddenly. But then he had gone to the help of two neighbors with both engine and horses in which work the oldest girl handled the tractor and the boy and himself the horse teams. The "whole dam family" could run the tractor which the young folks "took" to as they took to their playthings. It was the second he had bought—the first being "a big white elephant."

We discussed the war and we discussed a lot of nearby things connected with the war and the winning of it, but as memory reviews the line of our conversation, I can recall very little of this man's statements which were matters of opinion. It was a simple relation of facts, of what he had been doing and proposed doing to meet the times as far as he, a representative working farmer could on his own domain; and these were forthcoming only in response to a direct fire of questioning and cross-questioning. The only voluntary statement he made was a tribute to his wife's help both in the field and in the home since the boys left the farm. (By the way I found that the money he and his boy and girl had earned from the neighbors whom they helped to "seed" is to be divided between the Red Cross and the local "Prisoners of War" fund).

We parted at a quiet corner of the park, and having gone a few paces on my way, I involuntarily turned to regard that retreating unmilitary figure of the self-styled "bohunk" farmer. There goes a man for whom the future has no terrors! A self-contained, sincere soul who recognises no "trouble" he cannot outflank. With no better "start in life" than his health and his mother wit, there's nothing in credit or service he cannot command from any soul who knows him. Who does his own chores and can spare a bit for his neighbor. Who is less interested in governments and elections than in keeping himself and his household gods clean and at concert pitch. Who—but we're at the bottom of the page. This is not an "editorial" It's just the story of a simple man—for children who have "more need of models than criticism." And we're all children combing the world for the models that move us.

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