



The Old and The New Forever

I have been old and dilapidated long enough . . . all this will be changed. (I will be young and handsome (for the time being) and I will see things with the eyes of youth; hear things with ears of boyhood (strangely large for one so young as I—will be) and I will feel, smell and taste like the rising generation . . . and I will think; yes, I will think. I've practically made up my mind on that score, which is just as well . . . because I know so little, it is impossible for me to dodge doing that more or less involuntary act, aggravated into being . . . existence.

No more shall I complain about the food; for am I not young? isn't my stomach powerful? The work isn't hard for there is a spring to my muscles—I weigh more, now that I am younger and the world moves when I grab "a holt" of it.

My aches, pains and spavins will be a thing of the future—you won't hear me groaning in my sleep for years to come, for from this moment on—I am young; I am twenty-one—I hear my old man saying, "I wonder what's to become of the younger generation; they don't want to work."

"Dad," I will say, "why should they want to work? Is work a delight of some kind? To me it seems punishment—why should they want punishment?"

"No, it isn't a delight exactly," says the old man in his dry way, "but it's better'n starving to death."

"Then, we take this punishment only . . . in order to live; then living is a series of punishment—have I got it right? We are punished with work because we live; and live because we have accepted punishment. Isn't there any more to life than punishment? Dad, can't you be a little more cheerful . . ."

"Young man," says dad with mock severity, "you better get into those overalls and prepare to take on 'life' as bitter as they say it is—right now, there is enough deviltry in you to pull you through a day's work with flying colors. All your smartness ain't going to get you out of it—your mother's had a crop failure in the back garden . . . that means; work; work means money; money means paid bills; paid bills means life; life means work—one round of pleasure."

"But, dad, how smart does a man have to be to get out of work—does he have to be as smart as the American Indian?"

"Young man, how many times do I have to warn you about sarcasm—poverty with motion pictures and merry-go-rounds is preferable to the wild free life, fresh fish and bear-steak . . ."

"You said it, dad, and sarcasm is entirely missing from your words—but somehow you made my mouth water when you mentioned bear steak."

"Your mouth will water for liver and onions if you're late for work—I've got to be going—you better hurry on—and, for goodness sake, try to show the boss you want to work—even if you don't; even if you fail . . ."

"You betcha, dad; me for the comic stuff; we want to work—we work to want—I'll be there—tell 'em I'm coming."

I will tell the reader in strict confidence (like it was told to me) that my old man worked for a dollar a day. He said he was ashamed of himself for doing it and that he now recognizes that men working for nothing are very profitable to the employer. Before the dollar a day racket, he says there were no millionaires in this country. But soon after the men got going good, for a dollar a day, millionaires began to sprout right and left—like mushrooms over night. Soon the country was lousey with them . . . The working people are so productive when they work, he says, that if they donate the labor of their hands (all over and above their board and clothes) the wealth piles up in a most surprising manner—that's where our millionaires come from.

He also assured me that no change has occurred (since the dollar day) and insisted that five dollars today will buy as much as the dollar did then; in fact, a little more. "But," he says, "the inferiority of the present day products drags the 'pedro' down to the level of a dollar." He grew quite eloquent and says, "The 'dollar a day' has only changed its name to 'five a day,' thus proving the old saying: A rose by another name would smell as sweet."

I had been kidding him about his unionism and do you know, editor, he turned on me like a mad bull . . . "You've got a fine license to talk, young man," he says; "blaming us old timers for the few millionaires we made—and you are making millionaires faster today than we ever did—(because you are more numerous)."

"No, young man, there isn't a thing you can brag about—the capitalist system is the same yesterday, today and forever; until the workers inaugurate a system of their own."

"No fundamental principle in the system has been altered—nor would it do to alter—for the system is not an experiment—it is a dead ripe entity—no tinkering goes!"

We are dragging along in our fathers' brogans and like they, we forget to organize for a better system."