



Against the Grain

Well, the wages were kind of small for shocking, a mere \$3.50 a day, but, being a philosopher, I figured that wages are like small potatoes—they'll grow if you keep knocking the parasites off the vines—and as I had come all the way from Flint, Michigan, to do this shocking I felt it no more than right that I should be permitted to carry out our program. A question of money, the loss of two or three dollars a day, wasn't going to stop me now that I had my sleeves all rolled up and rearing to go.

So I climbed into the "tonneau" of Henry Ford's masterpiece, over a door which the farmer had thoughtfully haywired. While he was prayerfully cranking lizzie, I settled back in the seat and started figuring my time, based upon my prospective labor, at the rate of 35 cents per hour. You'd be surprised how it counts up. Before John got lizzie cranked up I had \$42.00 coming—according to my figures.

Finally we arrived at the old homestead, had supper (such as the ex-schoolmarm had assembled) and John then told me I could sleep anywhere under the mortgage, just so that I let him know where to find me in the morning, in case I was a heavy sleeper.

The breakfast was rather light including the coffee which was paler than usual. I called for a second cup, bound to get a kick out of it if I had to drink a gallon of water to get it. She graciously grabbed my cup and shortly I heard the kitchen pump coming to the rescue of the coffee pot.

Breakfast over we repaired to the fields, John to run the binder and I to do the shocking. He had about 40 acres down and I could see there would be no lost time on short rows. The grain was "macaroni" and the reads were curled and bushy, making shocking of it very difficult and disagreeable, but this was of no consequence to a man like myself, and soon I was shooting up shocks at the rate of one every five minutes, twelve every hour, sixty in a half day. I figured the breakfast fully warranted that many, considering the second cup of coffee I had had.

Dinner time rolled around and the farmer asked blessings over a panicky looking meal and I fervently echoed "amen" from the corner I was brightening. I must have put too much sincerity in the tone of my voice for he looked up suddenly to see if I meant it.

The dinner was so much better than the breakfast that I made up my mind that 120 shocks, in the afternoon, would be none too many. And would you believe it, that night when I walked home I was the proud father of 180 shocks built on less than half rations.

But in the meantime John had hired a neighbor boy to shock another field, so I remarked, "I see you've got another shocker." "Yes," said he, "I had to get one, seeing as how you'd never ketch up."

"Why, what do you mean, ketch up?"

"Ketch up with the binder," said he.

"Ketch up with the binder? I can't imagine what gave you the idea that I was going to ketch up with the binder."

"Why, it's customary," John protested.

"Well, isn't that strange, here I've been paying no attention to the binder at all."

"Yes," said John, "It's always customary to keep up with the binder in these parts, but I saw you couldn't do it so I had to hire another man."

"Well, John, I'll tell you how it is with me. I have three different speeds: low, intermediate and high. My work is just like your grain, it has three grades; one, two and three. I sell my work just like you sell your grain. When you take No. 1 grain to the elevator you expect No. 1 price. You would hardly let them have No. 1 grain for a grade 3 price. Of course, John, you understand, I've got the advantage over you—I can give you exactly what you pay for, while you, if they pay you No. 3 price, can't change the quality of your grain."

"I see," says John, and I could see he was deeply moved.

Another morning came from nowhere in particular. In the course of the forenoon a wind sprang up and started tearing into my shocks, pulling out fuzzy bundles here and there, and undoing much of my work. About nine o'clock the boss went in for lunch, same as yesterday. As he didn't invite me along I thought it would be too much like presuming to follow suit; then again, I wasn't quite sure he went in to lunch. You see, he had only recently been married, so I figured he stepped in to pass the time of day with his wife.

All things have their end and finally, with noon time, came my turn to have lunch. I was pretty gaunt when I sat down to the table and I felt like, there and then, changing my name to T. B. Gaunt. The meal could best be described as: a box of crackers and a centerpiece. Such was not the case, however. Among other things there were seventeen peeled potatoes on a saucer. Enough said. Just about the time I was mashing them down with the butter supply, the boss was through eating and was preparing to leave the table. It was then I made the unfortunate remark that caused him to doubt my loyalty, when I said:

"I can see right now there isn't enough food for both of us. One of us better leave and, so there won't be any trouble in the family, I think I had better be that one."

Ten minutes later we were in town 14 miles away. My, but them Ford cars can travel!