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Literature.

A MAN AT HIS WORK.

It was long after sundown when I camped on the roadside in the Rogue river valley, and the sky was full of the afterglow, and the Siskyou range was gleaming. Other tramps had used the nearer wood, but I scraped up enough to light a fire and boil some water for tea. I had a little mutton and some bread to eat, and I gulped it down miserably. What was I doing in such a place? And what was my place in the universe? I yearned terribly for some one to speak to. Even a common tramp of the usual order would have helped me in my mood that night.

But as the afterglow faded and the stars arose from the east and the crests of the Siskyous became mere sharp mountain forms against the sky the silence was oppressive. It was warm and very still, and the subdued hum of the unseen insect world accentuated the depth of silence on the human earth. My nerves were on edge. The howl of a chained dog on a distant farm made me start from a waking dream. I threw more wood on my fire, and unrolling my blankets, I lay down.

Perhaps I had been asleep no more than a few minutes when I awoke suddenly, finding that I had rolled over with my back to the blazing logs. But I was conscious even then that I was not alone, and, with the instinct of suspicion alight in me, I slid my hand to the butt of my pistol and rolled over as though still asleep. I saw a man sitting on the opposite side of my fire with his hands locked round his knees. He was staring into the embers with a far off look in his gleaming eyes. No more utterly melancholy face has ever fronted mine. I watched for more than a minute before he became conscious that I was awake.

"I hope I haven't disturbed you, partner," he said apologetically, "but it was chilly, and I hadn't any matches, and I'm getting old, getting old."

He murmured the last words to himself.

"That's all right, sonny," I answered. "You're welcome to so much."

"I was going to borrow a lighted stick and make a fire for myself. I've scraped up some wood just yonder."

"Bring it here, then," said I. "One big fire is better than two small ones."

And the old chap rose. He was long and haggard, with the bowed shoulders of ancient and continued toil. He walked as though greatly fatigued. He came back in a minute with his arms full of sticks, and putting some of them on the embers, he sat down again. I was wide awake now and got up.

"Don't," he began, but I stopped him.

"My tongue's rusty. I want to talk. You struck a bad streak of luck some time ago, old man, eh?"

"I did, partner. I'm an accursed man."

And then, he was man. But that's not an odd thing in the United States' standing army of tramps—not odd at all. Is it strange that toil and want and misery should drive some of those crazy who have not the strength to meet the bitter, newer order of civilization, who are crushed by competition and the good law that yields Beelzebub his tribute of laggards and weaklings.

I heated up the tea again. He drank the warm infusion of this commercial herb, which knew not China or Ceylon, with great eagerness, and thanked me most humbly. I felt encouraged, for I was not so low down, and, suppressing my anxiety as to the morrow, I kindly bestowed upon him the remains of a sheep bone and a crust. There are many orders among our tramps.

"You are a good sort," he told me. I denied it savagely.

"I'm nothing of the kind, old man. Don't give me any such slush, or you can shift your camp. Good! Why, I'd like to cut the throats of some men."

He slunk down as though I had struck him.

"Don't," he said. "I felt that way myself once, but I repent."

"Did you do it?"

"Do what, partner?"

"Cut any man's throat?"

He shook his head and smiled wanly.

"I think I did worse, partner. May I tell you? I like to tell it sometimes."

"Wait till I fill my pipe," I answered.

"Have you one?"

He produced a clay and lighted it.

"But perhaps you want to sleep?"

I shook my head.

"Fire away, sonny!"

But at first he could not talk. He began whittling a stick and muttered to himself. Perhaps he imagined that he was speaking aloud, for when I did catch what he was saying he was in the middle of a sentence.

"And so I took it over, paid for it and took it over with the mortgage on it, and I worked hard. It wasn't much of a place then, but there was the water to irrigate it. I planted more oranges and made a vineyard myself. I did it all, all, and God knows how I slaved and worked on it! All the men about the country said I was a hard, hard man, but I didn't think I was. Perhaps I made others work, but didn't I work myself? Hadn't I worked in Iowa for \$10 a month and in Oregon for \$20 all these years be-

fore I went down south to San Diego and put my money into this fruit ranch? Of course I had. Oh, but not so hard as I worked there when I worked for a place to bring my wife and child to from the east because I wanted them bad, and she hadn't been used to rough it, for she was daughter to a locomotive engineer in Minnesota, and her mother had a farm, the only one for miles without a mortgage on it. I've read of folks saying how lucky farmers were in the United States because they mostly don't pay rent. No but they pay interest, as I know.

"But, as I was telling, I worked for five years on my ranch, and then things was in shape. I seed the trees grow that I'd planted and my heart was in it all, and every orange and every pear or grape was part of it. They was all my children. And perhaps, partner you never owned no land. But even so you've travelled and the big desire has come over you to settle down and put you're feet deep in a bit of God's broad, good earth, saying, 'This is my little share, given me to make it fruitful,' for a man has, so to speak—and I've thought it out often—two wives, a woman and a bit of earth. But when a man takes a whole country or half a state it ain't according to my morality. It seems wicked, for there's fine men with none, and their strength is naught. They have no children out of the earth."

He dropped his pipe and stood up, and now he seemed to forget me, speaking to the air and the broad lands of that beautiful valley and the everlasting hills.

"But when five years was past and done I had the house in shape and the trees were full of fruit and the young orchard promising, and then I sent for Carrie and the child. So I had my good wife and the baby as was no baby now, but a growing girl as a fine young tree. For them I worked harder, and I was always level, if not more. Sometimes it was a real bit more, but of course the interest of the mortgage was heavy. And may the inventors of such be accursed, even as I am!"

"For, though a man without leeches sucking his blood may abide a bad season according to his strength and wait for the good return, which is God's gift to them as can endure his chastisement, it is not so when he works one hour for himself and ten for a sucking spider in a web of law in a city office. And a bad season came and I was behind my bond with the spider and on the added interest he took ten more per cent. To each dollar added to his account he added more till no good season could straighten me out again, and every bright day was heavy with clouds for me, and my best hope was dried up, like a tree dying with the scale.

"And now after five more years the time came when my wife's very keep, for she wasn't as strong as some, and the two girls, for there was another, seemed too much. I thought perhaps if she went back east again I could hire a man or a boy and get straight again, and I sent her back with money as I borrowed \$100 only, but they cost me \$10 a each year.

"And I lived God knows how, for I don't, because the long days was a bad dream, I felt that lonely. I was sorry at times that I'd ever come on land that the law called my own. But I hankered after it and the smell of it. And time and time again I dreamed it was all my own and free of interest, and I woke up crying tears of joy in a joyless house that wasn't mine. And the trees that seemed to know me were my children, and now when I walk I see the sun in the orange grove and smell the smell of the white blossoms, and my heart is sick with desire. But there aren't many trees there now."

"Perhaps there might have been if it hadn't been that the old lawyer as lent the young lawyer money to lend to me on the land I'd made came up to take a look at the land as was mostly his. And that is why I say I wanted once to cut a man's throat, for when I showed him round and was civil to him and spoke him fair I could have caught him by his fat throat and got him down and choked him, for he'd never really worked and he was fat and soft, with a heavy jowl, and his father had been a railroad man with lots of money. And this man, he says to me, but yet more to himself, 'If so be there was a good house built, it would be a lovely place.' And then he took a drink of wine and rode away in his buggy going soft and comfortable.

I went back mad to prune vines and scrape off scale and see to things just as if I was a hired man, with all the little profits leaking out and coming up in a spring in a town office with a gang of uncivil boys in it, learning the devil's work.

"That night as I laid in bed I knowed as well as if I heard him say it that if I was a dollar behind I'd be squeezed out even before the clause that gave 'em power to foreclose unless the hull principle came in force, for they that drew the mortgage knew how to draw it, and I signed it like an innocent, for the money I wanted was honey on a bear trap, and they had me tight.

"And of course, as is the nature of things, once in so many years there came a bad season, frost and a big wind that nipped me and drove me out like chaff. And I walked among my planted trees, and on the earth I turned over for years to give it the sun and air, and I was mad, for I heard the trees speak and the wind in the orange grove was like a voice. And I went in and gave the hired man his

money and told him to go quick. And he ran, for he was afraid and said things of me in town. But I was glad the wife and the children were away, because just then I read in a eastern paper how a ruined man had killed his own wife and children, and I knew well how it happened.

"I feared to go for my letter because I was behind and couldn't get up with these spiders. And so the notice of foreclosure came. And that day I neither worked nor ate, but I sat in the house thinking of the dead man in New York that had killed his own. I wondered how it was in the dark working of things that such was allowed, and here was all my years of sober, heavy work going over to a man who sat and cried out kindly that he would help them that wanted it, and not be hard. And he gave money to churches and was praised in the San Diego paper that he owned shares in till his name was spoken of in San Francisco, and some said he should be a senator.

"And the day passed, and it was noon, and then I went out and saw the sun get behind the orange trees that I had seen grow, and it was very beautiful. But my heart was dried up. I only felt like a man accursed, and a devil and a sinner not to be forgiven. And I took my axe and sharpened it till I could shave a big slice of horn off the palm of my hand, just as the sun was like blood on the foothills west of me. And God's light went wholly out of me. I took the axe into my orange grove, and I destroyed all the trees. Some I cut down and some I harked, and the young olives I destroyed and what I could of the vineyard. For I worked all night by the light of the moon till the dawn came, but even then I was not tired—no, nor did I feel as if I had done ought to tire me. And when the dawn came up I fired my house and the stable I had built, and I took my horse out, which I had trained and broken, but which was no longer mine. And I shot it there, yes, I shot it, and I watched its blood flow on the heavy dust, and I did not care one bit, nor was I sorry.

"Then I put on my hat and walked up into the hills for fear folks should come for folks who had not harmed me I did not want no harm, though I did not love them any more than I loved my wife and girls in the east. And I knew if I met a man and had the axe in my hand I should kill him.

"And I walked for three days, so far as I know, without food, and when I came to myself I was far away. Then I knew I had done a most evil thing, a thing hated by God. For I saw what a small thing I was, and I knew that the work of a man was for himself, and I knew that no man can work for himself. I saw that the lawyer could not have kept what he took. He, too, must have died, but still my beautiful trees would have been fruitful. And I had killed them, and by doing that I had destroyed a great part of myself. I bowed my head in the dust, and a great anguish came over me.

"For if my orchards and my vineyards and my groves had still been fruitful I could have said to myself, 'You have worked and have been rewarded if not as you desired.' But now my life was barren, and my labor wasted, and no greater anguish can smite any man. All the years had gone down beyond the sun, and in the night of my old age I have no consolation, and I can work no more. Forever and ever as I walk and tramp I see what I did, and if I could only undo it I would die happy. But it cannot be done. It cannot be done. And I am an old man, an old, old man. I want to go home."

His voice trailed off into a whisper, and he sat down and hugged his knees, staring into my dying fire.

And for a long time I did not speak. He was a very strange old man. But I gave him some tobacco, and he thanked me gently. I asked him if his wife were yet alive.

But he said that he did not know.—Morley Roberts in Illustrated London News.

Broiling Steak.

The ideal way of cooking steak is to broil it over a bright, clear bed of coals, turning it quickly and often, and cooking it till the dull, dark red hue of rawness turns to a bright rich red, all through. Such meat is not "raw," as the ignorant suppose; it is well cooked, but not overdone. An overdone steak is dark all through, and has been made indigestible by the hardening of its fibers by the over application of heat. If steak "doesn't agree with you," ten chances to one it is because it is cooked to death.

When a broiler and hot coals are not at hand, don't be afraid to heat an ungreased spider "good and hot," and lay the meat in it. The heat will crisp the outside almost instantly; turn it over quickly and sear the other side. Keep turning in the same way till it is done. Never let it cook long enough so that the juices of the meat separate and form on the surface that is uppermost; they should be cooked in, not out. No butter or salt till the cooking is completed; then transfer to a hot platter, spread with butter and salt to taste. Only the best of butter should be used upon it. One needs to give her undivided attention to the proper cooking of a steak.

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