

ADVENTURES WHILE PREACHING THE GOSPEL OF BEAUTY

NICHOLAS VACHEL LINDSAY

V

In Kansas: the Second and Third Harvest

TWO miles north of Great Bend. In the heart of the greatest wheat country in America, and in the midst of the harvest-time, Sunday, July 7, 1912.

I am meditating on the ways of Destiny. It seems to me I am here, not altogether by chance. But just why I am here, time must reveal.

Last Friday I had walked the ten miles from Ellinwood to Great Bend by 9 A. M. I went straight to the general delivery, where a package of tracts and two or three weeks' mail awaited me. I read about half through the letter-pile as I sat on a rickety bench in the public square. Some very loud-mouthed negroes were playing horse-shoe obstreperously. I began to wish Flynn had whipped Johnson. I was thinking of getting away from there, when two white men, evidently harvesters, sat down near me and diluted the color scheme.

One man said: "Harvest-wages this week are from two dollars and fifty cents up to four dollars. We are experienced men and worth three dollars and fifty cents." Then a German farmer came and negotiated with them in vain. He wanted to hold them down to three dollars apiece. He had his automobile to take his crew away that morning.

Then a fellow in citified clothes came to me and asked: "Can you follow a reaper and shock?" I said: "*Show me the wheat.*" So far as I remember, it is the first time in my life anyone ever hunted me out and *asked* me to work for him. He put me into his buggy and drove me about two miles north to this place, just the region John Humphrey told me to find, though he did not specify this farm. I was offered \$2.50 and keep, as the prophet foretold. The man who drove me out

has put his place this year into the hands of a tenant who is my direct boss. I may not be able to last out, but all is well so far. I have made an acceptable hand, keeping up with the reaper by myself, and I feel something especial awaits me. But the reaper breaks down so often I do not know whether I can keep up with it without help when it begins going full-speed.

These people do not attend church like the Mennonites. The tenant wanted me to break the Sabbath and help him in the alfalfa to-day. He suggested that neither he nor I was so narrow-minded or superstitious as to be a "Sunday man." Besides he couldn't work the alfalfa at all without one more hands. I did not tell him so, but I felt I needed all Sunday to catch up on my tiredness. I suspect that my refusal to violate the Sabbath vexed him.

There has been a terrible row of some kind going on behind the barn all afternoon. Maybe he is working off his vexation. At last the tenant's wife has gone out to "see about that racket." Now she comes in. She tells me they have been trying to break a horse.

The same farm, two miles north of Great Bend, July 8, 1912.

How many times in the counties further back I have asked with fear and misgiving for permission to work in the alfalfa, and have been repulsed when I confessed to the lack of experience! And now this morning I have pitched alfalfa hay with the best of them. We had to go to work early while the dew softened the leaves. It is a kind of clover. Once perfectly dry the leaves crumble off when the hay is shaken. Then we must quit. The leaves are the nourishing part.

The owner of the place, the citified party who drove me out here the other day and who is generally back in town, was on top of that stack this morning, his collar off, his town shirt and pants somewhat the worse for the exertion. He puffed like a porpoise, for he was putting in place all the hay we men handed up to him. We lifted the alfalfa in a long bundle, using our three forks at one time. We worked like drilled soldiers, then went in to early dinner.

This is a short note written while the binder takes the

necessary three turns round the new wheatfield that the tenant's brother and I are starting to conquer this afternoon. Three swaths of four bundles each must be cut, then I will start on my rounds, piling them into shocks of twelve bundles each.

I am right by the R. F. D. box that goes with this farm. I will put up the little tin flag that signals the postman. One of the four beasts hitched to the reaper is a broncho colt who came dancing to the field this afternoon, refusing to keep his head in line with the rest of the steeds, and, as a consequence, pulling the whole reaper. It transpires that the row in the horselot Sunday was caused by this colt. He jumped up and left his hoof-print on the chest of the man now driving him. So the two men tied him up and beat him all afternoon with a double-tree, cursing him between whacks, lashing themselves with Kansas whisky to keep up steam. Yet he comes dancing to the field.

On the farm two miles north of Great Bend, Wednesday evening, July 10, 1912.

I must write you a short note to-night while the rest are getting ready for supper. I will try to mail it to-morrow morning on the way to the wheat. Let me assure you that your letter will be heeded. I know pretty well, by this time, what I can stand, but if I feel the least bit unfit I will not go into the sun. That is my understanding with the tenant who runs the farm. I can eat and sweat like a Mennonite. I sleep like a top and wake up fresh as a little daisy. So far I have gone dancing to the field as the broncho did. But the broncho is a poor illustration. He is dead.

The broncho was the property of a little boy, the son of the man who owns the farm. The little boy had started with a lamb and raised it, then sold it for chickens, increasing his capital by trading and feeding till it was all concentrated to buy this colt. Then he and his people moved to town and left the colt, just at the breaking age, to be trained for a boy's pet by these men. Since he became obstreperous, they thought hitching him to the reaper would cure him, leaving a draught-horse in the barn to make place for the unruly one.

The tenant's brother, who drove the reaper, sent word to the little boy he had not the least idea what ailed Dick. He hinted to me later that whatever killed him must have come from some disease in his head.

Yes, it came from his head. That double-tree and that pitchfork handle probably missed his ribs once or twice and hit him somewhere around his eyes, in the course of the Sabbath afternoon services. Two whisky-lashed colt-breakers can do wonders without trying. I have been assured that this is the only way to subdue the beasts, that law and order must assert themselves or the whole barn-yard will lead an industrial rebellion. It is past supper now. I have been writing till the lamp is dim. I must go to my quilts in the hay.

To-day was the only time the reaper did not break down every half hour for repairs. So it was one continuous dance for me and my friend the broncho till about three o'clock in the afternoon, when the sun really did its best. Then the broncho went crazy. He shoved his head over the backs of two mules twice his size, and almost pushed them into the teeth of the sickle.

He was bleeding at the mouth and his eyes almost popped out of his head. He had hardly an inch of hide that was whole, and his raw places were completely covered with Kansas flies. And the hot winds have made the flies so ravenous they draw blood from the back of the harvester's hand the moment they alight.

The broncho began to kick in all four directions at once. He did one good thing. He pulled the callouses off the hands of the tenant's brother, the driver, who still gripped the lines but surrendered his pride and yelled for me to help. I am as afraid of bronchos and mules as I am of buzz saws. Yet we separated the beasts somehow, the mules safely hitched to the fence, the broncho between us, held by two halter-ropes.

There was no reasoning with Dick. He was dying, and dying game. One of the small boys appeared just then and carried the alarm. Soon a more savage and indomitable man with a more eloquent tongue, the tenant himself, had my end of the rope. But not the most formidable cursing could stop

Dick from bleeding at the mouth. Later the draught horse whose place he had taken was brought over from his pleasant rest in the barn and the two were tied head to head. The lordly tenant started to lead them toward home. But Dick fell down and died as soon as he reached a patch of unploughed prairie grass, which, I think, was the proper end for him. The peaceful draught horse was put in his place.

The reaper went back to work. The reaper cut splendidly the rest of this afternoon. As for me I never shocked wheat with such machine-like precision. I went at a dog-trot part of the time, and almost caught up with the machine.

The broncho should not have been called Dick. He should have been called Daniel Boone, or Davy Crockett or Custer or Richard, yes, Richard the Lion-hearted. He came dancing to the field this morning, between the enormous overshadowing mules, and dancing feebly this noon. He pulled the whole reaper till three o'clock. I remember I asked the driver at noon what made the broncho dance. He answered: "The flies on his ribs, I suppose."

I fancy Dick danced because he was made to die dancing, just as the Spartans rejoiced and combed their long hair preparing to face certain death at Thermopylæ.

I think I want on my coat of arms a broncho, rampant.

THURSDAY, JULY 11, 1912. Great Bend, Kansas.

Yesterday I could lift three moderate-sized sheaves on the run. This morning I could hardly lift one, walking. This noon the foreman of the ranch, the man who, with his brother, disciplined the broncho, was furiously angry with me, because, as I plainly explained, I was getting too much sun and wanted a bit of a rest. He inquired, "Why didn't you tell me two days ago you were going to be overcome by the heat, so I could have had a man ready to take your place?" Also, "It's no wonder dirty homeless men are walking around the country looking for jobs." Also, a little later: "I have my opinion of any man on earth who is a quitter."

But I kept my serenity and told him that under certain circumstances I was apt to be a quitter, though, of course, I

did not like to overdo the quitting business. I remained unruffled, as I say, and handed him and his brother copies of *The Gospel of Beauty* and *Rhymes to Be Traded for Bread* and bade them good-bye. Then I went to town and told the local editor on them for their horse-killing, which, I suppose, was two-faced of me.

The tenant's attitude was perfectly absurd. Hands are terribly scarce. A half day's delay in shocking that wheat would not have hurt it, or stopped the reaper, or altered any of the rest of the farm routine. He fired me without real hope of a substitute. I was working for rock-bottom wages and willing to have them docked all he pleased if he would only give me six hours to catch up in my tiredness.

Anyway, here I am in the Saddlerock Hotel, to which I have paid in advance a bit of my wages, in exchange for one night's rest. I enclose the rest to you. I will start out on the road to-morrow, bathed, clean, dead broke and fancy free. I have made an effort to graduate from beggary into the respectable laboring class, which you have so often exhorted me to do.

I shall try for employment again, as soon as I rest up a bit. I enjoyed the wheat and the second-hand reaper, and the quaintness of my employers and all till the death of Richard the Lion-Hearted.

I am wondering whether I ought to be as bitter as I am against the horse-killers. We cannot have green fields just for bronchos to gambol in, or roads where they can trot unharnessed and nibble by the way. We must have Law and Order and Discipline.

But, thanks to the Good St. Francis who marks out my path for me, I start to-morrow morning to trot unharnessed once again.

SUNDAY, JULY 14, 1912. In front of the general store at Wright, Kansas, which same is as small as a town can get.

I have been wondering why Destiny sent me to that farm where the horse-killers flourished. I suppose it was that Dick might have at least one mourner. All the world's heroes are

heroes because they had the qualities of constancy and dancing gameness that brought him to his death.

Some day I shall hunt up the right kind of a Hindu and pay him filthy gold and have him send the ghost of Dick to those wretched men. They will be unable to move, lying with eyes a-staring all night long. Dreadful things will happen in that room, dreadful things the Hindu shall devise after I have told him what the broncho endured. They shall wake in the morning, thinking it all a dream till they behold the horse-shoe prints all over the counterpane. Then they will try to sit up and find that their ribs are broken—well, I will leave it to the Hindu.

I have been waiting many hours at this town of Wright. To-day and yesterday I made seventy-six miles. Thirty-five of these miles I made yesterday in the automobile of the genial and scholarly Father A. P. Heimann of Kinsley, who took me as far as that point. I have been loafing here at Wright since about four in the afternoon. It is nearly dark now. Dozens of harvesters, already engaged for the week, have been hanging about and the two stores have kept open to accommodate them. There is a man to meet me here at eight o'clock. I may harvest for him four days. I told him I would not promise for longer. He has taken the train to a station further east to try to get some men for all week. If he does not return with a full quota he will take me on. While I am perfectly willing to work for two dollars and a half, many hold out for three.

The man I am waiting for overtook me two miles east of this place. He was hurrying to catch his train. He took me into his rig and made the bargain. He turned his horse over to me and raced for the last car as we neared the station. So here I am, a few yards from the depot, in front of the general store, watching the horse of an utter stranger. Of course the horse isn't worth stealing, and his harness is half twine and wire. But the whole episode is so careless and free and Kansas-like.

Most of the crowd have gone, and I am awfully hungry. I might steal off the harness in the dark, and eat it. Somehow

I have not quite the nerve to beg where I expect to harvest. I am afraid to try again in this fight with the sun, yet when a man overtakes me in the road and trusts me with his best steed and urges me to work for him, I hardly know how to refuse.

SUNDAY AFTERNOON, JULY 21, 1912. Loafing and dozing on my bed in the granary on the farm near Wright, Kansas, where I have been harvesting a full week.

The man I waited for last Sunday afternoon returned with his full quota of hands on the "Plug" train about nine o'clock. Where was I to sleep? I began to think about a lumber pile I had seen, when I discovered that five other farmers had climbed off that train. They were poking around in all the dark corners for men just like me. I engaged with a German named Louis Lix for the whole week, all the time shaking with misgivings from the memory of my last break-down. Here it is, Sunday, before I know it. Lix wants me back again next year, and is sorry I will not work longer. I have totalled about sixteen days of harvesting in Kansas, and though I sagged in the middle I think I have ended in fair style. Enclosed find all my wages except enough for one day's stay at Dodge City and three real hotel meals there—sherbet and cheese and crackers, and finger bowls at the end, and all such folly. Harvest eating is grand in its way but somehow lacks frills. Ah, if eating were as much in my letters as in my thoughts, this would be nothing but a series of menus!

I have helped Lix harvest barley, oats and wheat, mainly wheat. This is the world of wheat. In this genial region one can stand on a soap-box and see nothing else to the horizon. Walking the Santa Fé Trail beside the railroad means walking till the enormous wheat-elevator behind one disappears because of the curvature of the earth, like the ships in the geography picture, and walking on and on till finally in the west the top of another elevator appears, being gradually revealed because this earth is not flat like a table, but, as the geography says, curved like an apple or an orange.

In these fields, instead of working a reaper with a sickle

eight feet long, they work a header with a twelve-foot sickle. Instead of four horses to this machine, there are six. Instead of one man or two following behind to the left of the driver to pile sheaves into shocks, a barge, a most copious slatted receptacle, drives right beside the header, catching the unbound wheat which is thrown up loosely by the machine. One pitchfork man in the barge spreads this cataract of headed wheat so a full load can be taken in. His pardner guides the team, keeping precisely with the header.

But these two bargemen do not complete the outfit. Two others with their barge or "header-box" come up behind as soon as the first box starts over to the stack to be unloaded. Here the sixth man, the stacker, receives it, and piles it into a small mountain nicely calculated to resist cyclones. The green men are broken in as bargemen. The stacker is generally an old hand.

Unloading the wheat is the hardest part of the bargeman's work. His fork must be full and he must be fast. Otherwise his pardner, who takes turns driving and filling, and who helps to pitch the wheat out, will have more than half the pitching to do. And all the time will be used up. Neither man will have a rest-period while waiting for the other barge to come up. This rest-period is the thing toward which we all wrestle. If we save it out we drink from the water-jugs in the corner of the wagon. We examine where the grasshoppers have actually bitten little nicks out of our pitchfork handles. nicks that are apt to make blisters. We tell our adventures, and, when the header breaks down, and must be tinkered endlessly, and we have a grand rest, the stacker sings a list of the most amazing cowboy songs. He is a young man, yet rode the range here for seven years before it became wheat-country. One day when the songs had become hopelessly, prosaically pornographic I yearned for a change. I quoted the first stanza of Atalanta's chorus:

" When the hounds of Spring are on Winter's traces,
The mother of months, in meadow or plain,
Fills the hollows and windy spaces
With laughter of leaves and ripple of rain—— "

The stacker asked for more. I finished the chorus. Then I repeated it several times, while the header was being mended. We had to get to work. The next morning when my friend climbed into our barge to ride to the field he began:

“ ‘ When the hounds of Spring are on Winter’s traces,
The mother of months, in meadow or plain,
Fills the hollows——’

“ Dammit, what’s the rest of it? I’ve been trying to recite that piece all night.”

Now he has the first four stanzas. And last evening he left for Dodge City to stay overnight and Sunday. He was resolved to purchase *Atalanta in Calydon* and find in the Public Library *The Lady of Shalott* and *The Blessed Damozel*, besides paying the usual visit to his wife and children.

Working in a header-barge is fun, more fun than shocking wheat, even when one is working for a Mennonite boss. The crew is larger. There is occasional leisure to be social. There is more cool wind, for one is higher in the air. There is variety in the work. One drives about a third of the time, guides the wheat into the header a third of the time and empties the barge a third of the time. The emptying was the back-breaking work.

And I was all the while fearful, lest, from plain awkwardness, or shaking from weariness, I should stick some man in the eye with my pitchfork. But I did not. I came nearer to being a real harvester every day. The last two days my hands were so hard I could work without gloves, this despite the way the grasshoppers had chewed the fork-handle.

Believe everything you have ever heard of the Kansas grasshoppers.

The heights of the header-barge are dramatically commanding. Kansas appears much larger than when we are merely standing in the field. We are just as high as upon a mountain-peak, for here, as there, we can see to the very edges of the eternities.

Now let me tell you of a new kind of weather.

Clouds thicken overhead. The wind turns suddenly cold.

We shiver while we work. We are liable in five minutes to a hailstorm, a terrific cloudburst or a cyclone. The horses are unhitched. The barges are tied end to end. And *still* the barges may be blown away. They must be anchored even more safely. The long poles to lock the wheels are thrust under the bed through the spokes. It has actually been my duty to put this pole in the wheels every evening to keep the barges from being blown out of the barn-lot at night. Such is the accustomed weather excitement in Kansas. Just now we have excitement that is unusual. Just as the storm is upon us it splits and passes to the north and south. There is not a drop of rain.

We are at work again in ten minutes. In two hours the sky is clear and the air is hot and alkaline. And ten thousand grasshoppers are glad to see that good old hot wind again, you may believe. They are preening themselves, each man in his place on the slats of the barge. They are enjoying their chewing tobacco the same as ever.

Wheat, wheat, wheat, wheat! States and continents and oceans and solar-systems of wheat! We poor ne'er-do-weels take our little part up there in the header half way between the sky and the earth, and in the evening going home, carrying Mister Stacker-Man in our barge, we sing *Sweet Rosy O'Grady* and the *Battle Hymn of the Republic*. And the most emphatic and unadulterated tramp among us harvesters, a giant Swiss fifty years old, gives the yodel he learned when a boy.

This is a German Catholic family for which I have been working. We have had grace before and after every meal, and we crossed ourselves before and after every meal, except the Swiss, who left the table early to escape being blest too much.

My employers are good folk, good as the Mennonites. My boss was absolutely on the square all the week, as kind as a hard-working man has time to be. It gave me great satisfaction to go to Mass with him this morning. Though some folks talk against religion, though it sometimes appears to be a nuisance, after weighing all the evidence of late presented, I prefer a religious farmer.

HERE'S TO THE SPIRIT OF FIRE

*Here's to the spirit of fire, wherever the flame is unfurled,
In the sun, it may be, as a torch, to lead on and enlighten the
world;*

*That melted the glacial streams, in the day that no memories
reach,*

*That shimmered in amber and shell and weed on the earliest
beach;*

*The genius of love and of life, the power that will ever abound,
That waits in the bones of the dead, who sleep till the judgment
shall sound.*

*Here's to the spirit of fire, when clothed in swift music it comes,
The glow of the harvesting songs, the voice of the national
drums;*

*The whimsical, various fire, in the rhymes and ideas of men,
Buried in books for an age, exploding and writhing again,
And blown a red wind round the world, consuming the lies in
its mirth,*

*Then locked in dark volumes for long, and buried like coal in
the earth.*

*Here's to the comforting fire in the joys of the blind and the
meek,*

*In the customs of letterless lands, in the thoughts of the stupid
and weak.*

*In the weariest legends they tell, in their cruelest, coldest belief,
In the proverbs of counter or till, in the arts of the priest or the
thief.*

*Here's to the spirit of fire, that never the ocean can drown,
That glows in the phosphorent wave, and gleams in the sea-roses'
crown;*

*That sleeps in the sunbeam and mist, that creeps as the wise can
but know,*

*A wonder, an incense, a whim, a perfume, a fear and a glow,
Ensnaring the stars with a spell, and holding the earth in a net,
Yea, filling the nations with prayer, wherever man's pathway
is set.*

THE CONFESSIONS OF A HARVARD MAN

HAROLD E. STEARNS

II

DURING my final year I lived in Divinity Hall, nominally a Hall for the use of students in the graduate school of Theology, but nowadays largely occupied by undergraduates and students in the Law School. I remember a joke then current about Divinity,—“First ‘Thelog’: ‘Going to live in Divinity?’ Second ‘Thelog’: ‘No, sir, I don’t want to live with a crowd of damned atheists!’” I found most of the men serious, hard workers there, which was one reason I selected Divinity, knowing as I did how important it was for me to be able to work hard and uninterruptedly, if I hoped to accomplish what I had set my heart on. Rooming alone and spending only my sleeping and studying periods in Divinity, I did not attempt to make many friends there. My social hours were spent in gatherings at other classmates’ rooms. Directly above me, however, lived a preacher, who was studying Philosophy in the Graduate School, and during the year we became rather good friends. I recall that each Sunday morning, while I was still sleeping peacefully, he was out delivering a sermon to a country church. Toward dusk he would return, remove his long frock coat and entertain me with some of the raciest stories it has ever been my good fortune to hear. He had a theory, somewhat like that of my old Senior friends, that it made him “human,” and I honestly believe it did. All in all, my final year was not an unpleasant one. Yet after the dreary hot days of July and August in the Summer School, I packed my suit-case eagerly and left for New York. How quickly I was to long for the academic, secluded atmosphere of Divinity Hall of Cambridge in the bustling New York newspaper world!

Looking back over those three and a half years, one fact comes to mind more frequently and persistently than any other,—and that was my loneliness. I do not mean I lacked companionship; there was always plenty of that. Harvard men are