



progressive farming

Pap was what today we would call a progressive farmer. He bought the first windmill in our neighborhood and invested in the first blooded bull. He had the first twine binder and the first top buggy. He put up the first barbed wire fence and tried out the first woven wire picket fence. He was the first to use tiling for draining a wet place in the fields and once went a hundred

miles to buy a road cart which was the first one any of our neighbors had ever seen.

He was the first to plant Osage hedge for fencing and the first to dig it out when it didn't work. He had the first hay carrier and our old Brown corn planter was one of the early ones. He bought the first sulky rake and the first sulky plow. Some neighbors made slighting remarks about any man who had to ride while he plowed, but Pap only laughed and let them keep on walking.

He was the handiest man about doing things. His ax handles were so good that our neighborhood giant, Joe Mussack, had Pap make the extra strong ones he had to have. Pap was a fine carpenter and the best wood chopper in the neighborhood. He doctored all the sick animals on our place and got called to help with the sick stock on neighboring farms. He grafted fruit trees, crossed varieties of plants and vines; knew cures for snake bite and ivy poisoning; and spayed, castrated, caponized and did other kinds of animal doctoring. No one had taught him these things, he just seemed always to know how.

Sometimes, however, he guessed wrong about a critter's ailments or prescribed the wrong remedy. One winter we had an epidemic of hog cholera and the animals were dying by the dozens. First they would lose their appetites, then they would have the cramps and a hoarse cough. Soon after this they would die. Pap had a fine barrow that quit eating for a day or two, and developed a bad cough. We put him in a pen by himself and waited for the inevitable.

That Saturday night in town all the farmers were talking about the cholera epidemic. Luther Talbot said that down in the Jim Linder neighborhood the farmers had cured their sick hogs with tobacco juice. Chauncey Blodgett, who never used the stuff, agreed that it ought to be good for something. Pap said little but he was taking in all the comments about the tobacco cure.

Early the next morning Pap went to work. He cut a plug of Horse Shoe into little squares and Mother boiled them for half an hour in an iron pot on the kitchen stove. As soon as the water got a good rich color he poured it into a long-necked bottle and we all went down to the sick hog. The older boys hung onto the barrow and Pap pried open his mouth and poured every bit of the mixture down the hog's throat.

As soon as the boys let him go, the hog staggered into a pile of straw, keeled over on his side and began to tremble as if he were having a chill. Pap put a horse blanket over him but he shook worse than ever. Inside of ten minutes he straightened out to full length and settled down as quiet as a stone. It was all over and the prize hog was dead, dead as a door nail, dead as Pharoah — dead from a dose of tobacco poisoning big enough to have put twenty hogs out of business.

Pap never let on like anything had gone wrong. He just turned to us and said "Well, he didn't die of cholera, anyway." And he was certainly right about that!

Then there was the horse named Shug. Shug never was healthy. He was an off-looking animal too. His feet were as big as half bushel measures and usually split

badly. His hair never shed like other horses but hung in stringy wisps. He had great big ugly lumps under his belly and nearly all the hair came out of his tail. In spite of all his bad luck, however, he grew to be a big, bony horse and furnished Pap with every excuse to practice his home remedies.

When Shug was about six years old he fattened out and shed his surplus hair. Pap put him in a box stall in the barn and intended to sell him to the first person making an offer. But then Shug got sick again and began to look bad.

About the same time Pap had bought a new force pump, fifty feet of garden hose and a nozzle that could squirt water to the top of the house. One day Pap got the idea that we ought to try squirting Shug with the new equipment. After the treatment we turned poor Shug loose in the apple orchard but he just staggered behind a hay stack and collapsed.

After supper, when I started after the cows, I went past that way to see how Shug was getting along. He was lying close against the hay stack, stretched out like he was asleep. I went up and gave him a little punch, but he didn't budge a bit. He was asleep, all right, and he never woke up either. It took us all working steady 'til almost bed time to dig a hole big enough to bury him. But we finally got it done, rolled Shug in and covered him up for good and all.

Pap said we had overdone the pump treatment. But we kids never could see, for the life of us, how we could be included in the blame. Pap gave all the signals — all we did was to work the pump handle.

We didn't always come out so well with new machinery, either. Pap had bought a Minneapolis twine binder, the first in the neighborhood, and folks came for miles around to see it cut and bind the grain. Pap took a great pride in it, for it was a wonderful looking machine, almost as big as a thrasher, and cost \$350. At the end of harvest that year haying was right on top of us, and Pap left that new binder out in the apple orchard for a few days before he put in it its shed. Boy-like, I had to do some tinkering with that binder.

Whenever I got a chance, and nobody was watching, I would pull down the twine in a loop about the size of a bundle, trip the trigger and turn the binding apparatus over, and watch the little thingumbob grab the twine and tie it in a chicken-head knot. I bet I did that more than a hundred times during the two or three days the binder sat there. I hid the twine I was wasting in a half caved-in old well down by the Jack barn.

I made a careful study of the cog wheels that ran along one end, and wondered just what each one had to do with the operations. Finally curiosity got the best of me, and I pulled the cotter key and slipped one of the middle cog wheels off to see whether the binder would tie a knot without it. But when I had the handles about half way over the whole thing locked itself tight and refused to go on or go back. I shook it, and wiggled it, and tried to force it, but all to no use. There it was. I had ruined it — and had Pap to deal with when he came in from the field!

The first thing I thought of was to run away. Then I decided to deny all knowledge of the happening, and

stick to it. Then I remembered that Mother and one of my sisters had seen me monkeying with that binder, and had told me a time or two that I had better leave it alone. I was in an awful fix. All I could do was to wait for developments and take whatever came.

The men came in to dinner, ate, rested a while, and went back to the fields without noticing a thing. That evening they walked right past the binder, doing the chores, but never paid the least attention to it. And there stuck both handles straight up in the air. Anybody should have noticed that they didn't belong that way!

This went on for a couple of days when there came a lull in the field work and Pap called all hands to help roll the binder under its new shed, and put up the heavy door. I felt something give way in my insides, and I had the hardest kind of a time to get my breath. But I went along with the men, because I couldn't get out of it.

A mole had thrown up a little mound of fresh dirt right in the path, and the men all stopped to look at it, and that gave me a chance to get to the binder first without being noticed. There was a gunny sack lying there that twine had come in, and quick as a flash, I grabbed it up and threw it over the binder handles. That saved the day for me, I am just as sure as can be. Not a soul noticed it and in a few minutes the binder was in its shed with the big door fastened shut.

For the first time in three days I breathed easier again. The sun shone, the birds sang, food tasted better. Life was again worth living. It would be a whole year before anybody saw that binder again, and I would have all that time to get it put back together again. The exodus

of the Children of Israel from Egyptian bondage couldn't have meant any more to them than this escape did to me. It wasn't the fear of a flogging so much as that sneaking feeling you have when you get caught in some kind of devilment. That was where the shoe pinched the worst. If there is any worse feeling than that I never found out what it was.

In a week or so I got a chance to slip into the shed without anyone seeing me. But it was the same old story — everything locked as tight as a drum. A few days later I got another chance, but again without any results. I suppose that the balance of that summer I made as many as forty trials and each trial ended the same way, with not a particle of progress made.

I thought about getting John Cappes to help some day when the folks were gone, but the Cappes didn't have a binder and probably he wouldn't know any more about the machine than I did. Then there was always the danger that he might forget and say something about the machine, and the secret would get out.

At last I decided to write to Minneapolis where it was made, and ask them how to fix it. But how would you describe a thing like that! After four or five times at trying to write a letter I was so confused that I didn't even know myself what I was trying to say. So I gave that up too.

During the winter I even tried a couple of times to fix that binder. But it was so cold in the shed that my hands got numb and I was forced to give up. So I had to wait for Spring.

Along late in March I tried again. But it was simply

no use. I couldn't budge the thing and I began to lose all hope.

Pretty soon it was mid-June and in three weeks' time harvest would be here again. Then the whole monstrous truth would come out and I'd really be in for it. Every time I thought about it I could feel hot flashes run all the way up and down my spine.

About that time we had a lesson at Sunday school about "The Way of the Transgressor Is Hard." The teacher laid it on pretty strong and did his level best to bring out the main points in that lesson, but he didn't half do it justice. I could have told him things on that subject he had never dreamed about.

About the first of July things began looking so black that I began to pray in earnest. I would go away off in some quiet place and plead with God to show me how to fix that confounded binder. Once I rode a mile or more into the woods to be sure I was all alone. There I bared my troubles, confessed I had done wrong, and begged for help. I tried reading the Bible to see if I could get any light but I never found a thing in there about binders, or any kind of machinery. But I did stumble onto a passage where people were told to do their praying in a closet, so I decided to try that.

That night, when everybody was sound asleep, I slid out from behind Frank, slipped down stairs and cat-footed it to the closet. I went right in and shut the door behind me. Then I got down on my knees and did some real praying. I felt sure I was going to get somewhere now, as I was following out instructions to the letter. I

admitted I had done a great wrong, pleaded for mercy, and asked for light on the subject that had been bothering me so long. Then I went upstairs to bed again and had a fairly good night's sleep.

Next morning, long before getting up time, I was out at the shed, trying my hand again on fixing that binder. I set my eyes on that set of cog wheels in front, and wiggled the handles, first one way and then the other. Pretty soon my eyes fell on a trigger sort of thing that was resting against a lug. I raised the lug up, so the trigger didn't touch, and, believe it or not, the handles came free so I could turn them backward. When that lug came around again to where the trigger caught on it, I lifted it again with the same results, and in another minute or two I had the handles back where they belonged.

Then I clapped the cog wheel back in place and the binder worked just as well as it ever did.

No one knew how relieved and thankful I was. My heart filled with gratitude to God for the help He had given. It may seem a small thing for God to get interested in, but He knew that to me it was the biggest kind of case and amounted to far more than running a government or straightening out some other mess.

When we moved the binder out of its shed a week later, Frank noticed that the oil can was toppled over on its side and told me to straighten it. But I pretended not to hear him and just left it lying there. I would not have tried to change anything about that binder for the best horse in Iowa.