

Another Birthday

"WAIT, FATHER! Let me go with you!"

John Deere was putting a plow into his wagon. Charles, his eight-year-old son, came running to join him. The boy climbed on the wagon wheel and touched the name on the wooden beam on the plow. "Where are you going to test this self-polisher?" he asked.

"I'm going to take it to some river bottom land. Did you finish your chores for Mother?"

"Yes, Father, I did. But I hurried so I could go with you!"

As the wagon jolted down the country road, John remembered the first time he had seen the

sturdy lad sitting beside him. A few months after the testing of his first steel plow, he had heard that the wagons bringing his family from the East had reached Dixon. Amos Bosworth had gladly lent him a horse, and he had galloped out to meet them.

After he had hugged the older children, Demarius had handed the tiny, blanket-wrapped Charles to him. "Here, John," she had said with a tired smile, "Take your baby. He has cried all the way from Vermont!"

So little Charles had entered Grand Detour on horseback, held proudly against his father's broad shoulder. Young Charles still liked nothing better than to be with his father.

John Deere was no longer just a regular village blacksmith. Now he was also a manufacturer of plows. So many farmers had wanted his Self-Polisher that he had gone into partnership with Major Andrus. They had built a

large, two-story brick building where many more plows could be made. Last year, in 1843, they had turned out four hundred plows.

John often looked up from his forge to find Charles watching him. Sometimes he let the small boy pump the bellows, just as he had done for Captain Lawrence. He knew how important and grown-up it made a lad feel.

John was proud of his young son's interest in the making of plows. He smiled now as the boy asked, "Is this Self-polisher made from the steel that came across the ocean?"

"Yes, this one was made from English plate steel. But the steel had such a long journey over water that it rusted some. It wouldn't polish as smoothly as we wanted. That's why we got that big new grindstone that the horse turns. I'm going to test this moldboard now on that sticky bottom land to find out if it will scour as brightly as it should."

"Why do you have to send across the ocean for steel?" Charles asked.

"Because there is no steel mill in the United States that makes the kind we need for our plows," John answered thoughtfully. He was thinking that soon he would make a journey back to Pennsylvania to see if plow steel could be made for him in the Pittsburgh steel mills.

As he drove along, John Deere thought about other problems. Iron and coal had to be hauled forty miles into Grand Detour. Often the wagons got stuck on muddy roads. Taking new plows over these poor roads to farmers in other parts of Illinois was a hard job, too. Until last year, he had hoped the new railroad would come through Grand Detour. But now he knew it was going to miss the village.

The Mississippi River was only fifty miles west of Grand Detour. It was much easier to move loads in boats than in wagons. Should he

move his plow factory and his family to a town beside the Mississippi?

He would talk it over with Demarius. Their happy little home in Grand Detour was really too small for their large family. Besides the five children born in Vermont, they now had little Emma, four years old, and baby Alice. If they moved, he would build Demarius a fine big house in their new town.

"Our Self-polisher worked fine, didn't it, Father?" Charles said proudly, as they were going home. "I guess you make the best plow in the whole world!"

"Well, I keep trying to, anyway, son. Do you know, I just remembered something from a long time ago that may make our plows even better!"

"What is it?" Charles asked eagerly.

"When I was about your age, I used to polish my mother's needles by pushing them in and out of a little cloth strawberry that had a finely

ground metal called emery powder inside it. That emery powder would polish those needles till they shone like silver!"

"And you're going to get some emery powder for your plows!" Charles guessed.

John smiled at his son's quick thinking, "You're right, Charles," he admitted, "but it won't be in a cloth strawberry. It will be on a wheel that turns—an emery wheel. Remember, son, if you set your mind to it, you can always find a way to make a thing better."

On a cold February night in 1882, a large group of people had gathered on a street at the foot of a steep hill in Moline, Illinois.

"Remember, folks," a man called, "we don't want him to hear a sound until we have the house surrounded! When I whistle, you shout 'Happy birthday' loud and clear! Don't forget what to say when he comes out!"

The crowd made their way up the snowy

street. They could see at the top of the hill the lighted windows of John Deere's beautiful large home overlooking the Mississippi River.

The people climbing the hill were office workers from his big farm implement factory, which was now called Deere & Company. As they struggled through the deep snow, they talked about the man they wanted to surprise.

One young man said to his older companion, "How long have you worked for Mr. Deere?"

"Why, I began working for John Deere the same year that his son Charles came into the company. That was twenty-four years ago!"

"Mr. Deere had a son that died, didn't he?"

"Yes. His name was Francis. He was only nineteen years old when he died. Mr. Deere had just moved his factory from Grand Detour. That was back in 1847—thirty five years ago!"

The younger man spoke again. "In the summer when I see all the corn and oats growing

in the fields around here, I wonder what this part of the country would be like now, if John Deere hadn't made the farmers a steel plow!"

"It's hard to say. We just can't imagine this country without farms."

"I suppose at first most of the plows were sold here in the Midwest. Now we get orders for Deere plows from all over the world."

"Yes, John Deere's business grew rapidly because he always used only the best materials, and he improved his plows every year."

"I know Mr. Deere is seventy-eight years old today, but just yesterday when I was out in the forge shop, I saw him come in, go over to an anvil, take off his coat and harnner out a piece of hot iron!"

The older man laughed. "I guess John is prouder of having been a good blacksmith than of having had one of his plows win the International Award in France! The happiest look

I've ever seen on his face was once when he stopped to talk to me. He had just returned from a trip back to Vermont. He fairly beamed when he told me he had met a farmer back there who was still using a hayfork that John had made in his first blacksmith shop."

The younger man nodded. "Even though Mr. Deere is a rich man, he hasn't forgotten how hard it is to make a living sometimes. After my uncle had worked in the plow factory a long time, his eyes began to bother him. A foreman told him that he couldn't work there any more. Mr. Deere saw my uncle on the street and asked why he wasn't at work. When he heard what had happened, Mr. Deere was very angry. 'You go back and tell that man I sent you!' he said. 'As long as I live there'll be work for you in my factory!' My uncle still has a job there-but one that doesn't hurt his eyes."

"That's like John Deere. He looks out for

his workers," agreed the older man. "He's the most generous man I've ever known, too. He is always using his money to help people."

"He's a grand old gentleman, all right," replied the young man. "We're all proud to work for him. I hope he's really going to be surprised tonight."

The crowd of people had now reached the top of the hill. They had surrounded the front part of the house. A sharp whistle sounded.

"Happy birthday, John Deere! Happy birthday!" everyone shouted.

The door opened and tall straight, broad-shouldered man stood there. "Thank you, friends! Thank you!" he called. The light from the open door shone on his thick white hair. "Come in! Won't you all come in?"

But before they entered, they shouted again, "Happy birthday to our John Deere—the man who gave the world the steel plow!"