

Fire!

"THAT'S A mighty fine smithy you've got there!" John gave the last nail another blow with his hammer. Then he turned to see Lemual Derby, whose farm was just across the road.

"Hello, Lemual," he greeted his neighbor. John stepped back to look at his new building. It was his first blacksmith shop. He had built it himself, and he was really proud of it.

"I guess it will do," he said modestly. "Now if the folks here in Leicester Four Corners and the farmers round-about just have enough work to keep me busy, I'll be right glad I settled here."

"That's why I came over, John," Lemual explained. "I'd like to be the first one in these parts to have a John Deere hay fork! Could you make me one? My cousin in Vergennes has one you made when you worked up there. He claims it slides in and out of the hay as easy as a hot knife cutting butter!"

John laughed. "Well, I do curve the tines and polish them as bright as I used to shine my mother's needles."

At the thought of his mother, John felt sad. Many changes had come in the eight years since he had finished his apprenticeship. There had been much sickness. Nearly every family had lost loved ones. Both his mother and his brother Francis had died.

Betsey still did dressmaking. William was a schoolmaster. George had married and was now far off at sea with the United States Navy,

John looked down the road. He was remem-

bering how he used to push his mother's needles in and out of the little red strawberry. Suddenly his eyes brightened. He saw his pretty young wife, Demarius, coming up the road. In her arms she carried their year-old son, Francis.

"Lemual, tomorrow I'll build the first fire in my forge," John said. "I promise you'll have your hayfork before nightfall."

Then he hurried to meet his wife, took his husky young son and tossed him playfully in the air. "I wish your Uncle Francis could have lived to see what a strapping big namesake he has!" John told the laughing baby.

"Why, John, the shop is all finished, isn't it?" cried Deinarius.

"Yes, and I have my first piece of work—a hayfork for Lemual Derby!"

That summer John was indeed busy. Leicester Four Corners was a little village about twelve miles south of Middlebury. Stagecoaches, farm

wagons, and carriages came through the Four Corners on their way to bigger towns.

Farmers soon learned that hoes, rakes, and shovels made by the young smith, John Deere, were far better than any others they had had.

The stagecoach drivers sang his praises all along their routes. "Yes, siree!" one of them told another, "When John Deere puts a new band or bolt on a coach, you can be sure it won't work loose. It's on to stay!"

"That's right," the other driver agreed. "Re's the best man to turn a shoe, too. A few weeks ago I thought I'd have to get rid of my favorite mare. She kept going lame, no matter how I doctored her. One day I pulled into Four Corners. Molly had gone lame again. In no time young John Deere made a special built-up shoe for her. Do you know, Molly trotted out of there as spry as a colt! Hasn't been lame since. I wish there was a John Deere at all our stops!"



But in spite of John's fine workmanship and his growing business, hard times were just ahead for the Deere family. One cold winter night when the wind was blowing hard, John and Demarius heard a pounding on the door.

It was Lemual Derby. "Hurry, John!" he shouted. "Your shop's ablaze!"

John pulled on his trousers over his night-shirt and ran toward the smithy. He got there just in time to see the flaming roof cave in. No one could even get close to the roaring fire.

He stood barefooted in the snow, watching the shop he had so proudly built burn to the ground. His shoulders drooped with discouragement. He could hardly believe it was gone.

Lemual came over and put his hand on John's shoulder. "I'm right sorry!" he said.

The young blacksmith shook his head slowly. Then he straightened his shoulders, lifted his chin, and replied with determination, "That's

all right, Lemual. I can build it again. This time Ill improve it some.”

Demarius worried because her husband worked so hard. He worked from dawn until dark. Often he forgot to come home to eat.

Demarius with little Francis toddling along beside her, would take John a basket of lunch she had packed. As he laid aside his hammer and saw and sat down to eat, Demarius' bright eyes would sparkle with pleasure.

He could not talk with her and play with his son for very long. He was too eager to finish the building so he could work at his trade and earn money for his family.

Soon the new shop was completed. John and Demarius thought life was wonderful again. They rejoiced especially because they now had a sweet baby girl whom they named Jennette.

But their troubles were not over. Ill a few months misfortune came to them again.

When John carefully put out his forge fire and went home for the night, a storm with much thunder and lightning had already begun. As he stood looking out the window at the black clouds, a crash of thunder shook the house. At the same time he saw a big bolt of lightning flash down from the sky and strike his new smithy. The shop burst into flames.

As before, nothing could be done to save it. With a heavy heart John stared down at the smoldering ashes and realized that he would have to build his blacksmith shop for the third time. Demarius felt like crying as she stood beside her husband with her arm through his. She could think of nothing comforting to say.

"The Lord sees fit to test us in many ways," John said softly. "But if the first Vermonters could fight the wolves, Indians, and British, I guess we can fight bad luck."

He put his finger under Demarius' chin and

tilted her head up. "We won't be discouraged," he told her. "Back in school Master Hoyt was always saying, 'If at first you don't succeed, try, try, again.' That's what we'll do."

Demarius blinked back her tears and smiled at her tall, broad-shouldered husband. She was proud of his courage.

Their third shop was welcomed eagerly by the farmers and travelers. Once again Demarius was concerned over the long, hard hours John spent at the anvil. But she was even more concerned at the worried expression she saw so often on his face. One evening as she sat sewing by candlelight, John spoke.

"Today a man named Amos Bosworth came to see me. He wants me to move to Royalton and be his master mechanic. He has a big blacksmith shop in connection with the hotel. Six stages begin and end their runs at his shop. It's a busy place, and the pay is good."

Demarius put down her sewing and looked at her husband. He was frowning thoughtfully. "But, John," she said, "you've worked so terribly hard to get a shop of your own! Surely nothing will happen to this one!"

"It doesn't seem likely," he answered. "But I lost so much in both fires that no matter how long I work each day, I can't seem to get ahead. If I worked for Mr. Bosworth, I wouldn't have to keep buying new supplies. Soon we could pay off all our debts."

Now Demarius understood what had been worrying her husband. "I trust your judgment, John," she replied quietly. "You do as you think best. I'm sure you will do the right thing."

So the young John Deere family moved over the Green Mountains and into the valley of the White River. It was a move that was to change their lives, and the lives of many Eastern farmers who would soon be pioneers of the West.