

The Call of the West

"You LADS pile out of that stage! They'll be bringing the horses around any minute now!" Amos Bosworth shouted at the group of boys playing in and on the stagecoach in front of the hotel. "Get down off that seat, you two! That driver will tan your hides if he catches you fellows on his coach!"

John Deere stood in the doorway of the big shop. He rubbed his hands on his leather apron and smiled at the swarm of youngsters jumping out of and off the stagecoach. It didn't seem very long ago that he and Seth had done the same thing—and been chased off, too.

As the driver stepped out on the hotel porch, the two boys on the driver's seat jumped to the ground and scooted behind a farm wagon. "I'll skin you scallywags alive!" he shouted, shaking his fist at the scattering children.

"A stagecoach attracts boys like honeysuckle does the bees!" Amos said to John.

"Right you are!" John chuckled. "We boys in Middlebury used to play on the coaches every chance we got. Once we released the brake and let one roll down a little hill. My friend, Seth, broke his arm when he jumped off! The stage hit a tree, and it took Captain Lawrence two hours to **fix** the broken wheel!"

"I'll wager you were right there watching the smith work." Amos declared.

"Yes, I was," John admitted. "I worked the bellows for the Captain, But that didn't save me from being punished when my mother heard what had happened!"

Amos nodded and grinned. "I knew you must have been a blacksmith boy! No one could be as fine a smith as you are now if he hadn't been around a forge fire all his life!"

"Well, thank you, Amos," John answered. "It's true that the ring of a hammer on an anvil has always been music in my ears. Speaking of blacksmithing, there's something that's been bothering me lately."

"What's that, John?"

"Fellow came through here yesterday and showed me some shovels, hoes, and rakes made in one of the new factories. He said they turned out more in a week than I could make in a year."

"I guess it's true, John. New factories are being built all through the East. What did you think of those factory shovels?"

"They looked pretty fancy, but they didn't seem very well-made. Handle wasn't made of oak or hard maple. Looked as if it might snap off

first time you tried digging out a boulder. That doesn't seem right to me, Amos."

Again Amos nodded in agreement. "Those factories don't much care how long a shovel or a rake lasts. They're just interested in making a lot of them and selling them cheap."

"If I was running a factory," John declared, "I'd want people to be satisfied with my product. I'd make the best shovels or hoes I could, out of the finest materials I could get, even if it meant making fewer of them!"

"I'm sure you would, my friend!" Amos slapped John on the back. Then he laughed. "Now don't go leaving me to run a shovel factory! Why, since you've been taking care of our stages, we've had fewer breakdowns this whole year than we used to have in a month."

John smiled. He was pleased that Amos Bosworth liked his work. Many travelers stayed over night at the hotel. Often they came in-



to the shop to watch the smith at his forge. Many of them were on their way West.

"That's the place to go," they'd tell John. "Out to Ohio or Indiana, or Illinois! Rich farm land as far as the eye can see! Good black soil that will grow anything! You can leave your stone boat here. There's no rocks to dig out of that prairie ground!"

Often John put new iron on wagon wheels for Vermont farmers who were starting westward. "Yes, John," they'd say. "We hate to leave our old home, but times are too hard here! Some years we can't raise a crop at all."

Often John heard the invitation, "Why don't you pack up your family and go with us? We'll need a good blacksmith in our new town."

John smiled and shook his head. Vermont was his home. He loved the Green Mountains and the villages nestled in their quiet valleys. Demarius would hate to go so far away from her

father, mother, brothers, and sisters. Her father, William Lamb, had one of the few really good farms in that part of Vermont.

But in the evenings as John rode about the countryside, he often looked at the gold and purple sunset sky and felt a longing to see those rolling prairies of the West.

One evening as Demarius sat rocking their new little daughter, Ellen Sarah, John said, "I know you're lonely here in the country. Now that we have saved some money, I've been thinking of building my own shop in the village of Hancock. What do you think of the idea?"

"I think it would be fine, John. I'd like having closer neighbors, and I know you'd be happier working your own forge."

John Deere built his new smithy close beside a mountain stream. He built a stone dam across this stream and used the waterpower to turn his grindstone. He was kept very busy.

His brightly polished hay forks were in great demand. Farmers liked the way he repaired and sharpened all their tools. He made an iron plow for a young farmer. John smiled when he remembered how farmers used to be afraid that iron would poison the soil.

Although he worked long hours at his forge, very little cash money came in return for his labor. As they had at the tailoring shop, people paid their debts by bringing in their extra corn, potatoes, or maple syrup. But John needed money to buy bars of iron and coal for his forge. He needed money to buy clothes for his family.

Demarius and the children lived in a large, comfortable home just a little way down the road from the smithy. Francis, who was seven years old, now had three little sisters. John's face was often lined with worry these days as he tried to work harder than ever to provide for his wife and children.

Demarius understood his worry. "John," she said to him one day, "many people owe you money. They must know we have bills to pay, too. Can't you collect money from any of them?"

"Times are hard for everyone," he replied, shaking his head sadly. "What little money the fanners have, they need to buy salt or shoes or medicine. I can't ask them to give me money if it means some child will have to go without a pair of shoes or without medicine."

Demarius looked fondly at her big husband, He was so kind-hearted! She knew he would always help others. Then she sighed as she thought of the things their own children needed.

One evening Demarius saw John coming home to supper, He was taking long fast strides. His head was high and he was smiling. She ran to meet him. "What is it, John?" she cried. "You look bursting with good news!"

"Guess who stopped to see me this afternoon?"

Before she could answer, he hurried on. "Amos Bosworth! He's on his way West! He's sold his stage lines, and he's going out to Illinois—to a little place called Grand Detour! A friend of his named Leonard Andrus has started a little town there—right where a river makes a big bend! There's water power aplenty! Andrus has already built a sawmill."

"Slow down a bit, John!" Demarius laughed. "I know what you're going to say next. They'll need a good blacksmith in Grand Detour."

John smiled at her. His eyes twinkled with excitement. "Yes, that's what Amos said. He urged me to go out there and see for myself. Do you think I should go, Dernarius?"

"Yes, I do, John," she answered without hesitating. "You get so little here in return for your hard work. Out in the new lands the farmers will make a better living. So will a fine blacksmith named John Deere!"