

January 5, 1933

Dear Mr. Reynolds:

Here is a little piece which I am afraid you may not want to bother with. If so, please be frank and I will look after it.

Obviously it would be useless to try Colliers, The Cosmopolitan, The American or The Delineator. Probably Harpers or Scribners would consider it. I hardly think it would have a chance at the Saturday Evening Post, but nevertheless they do occasionally publish something not so far away.

But don't bother with it if you think it a hopeless proposition.

Very sincerely

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HIS INHERITANCE

My acres ran to the top of the hill, the house standing on the road in the Valley. There were fifty of them bordering on the farm of a newcomer - "that furriner," "that Dago", as my New England neighbors called him.

Being little in the country, I had never seen the man until the question of a water supply came up and the neighborhood mentor told me of a famous Spring on his farm, enough water to supply the Valley. "What you should do is to get him to sell you the right and pipe it down."

"But it is valuable, could I afford it?"

He was canny, my consultant, and winking shrewdly said, "Leave it to me, he'll be tickled to death to get \$10.00."

I shall always remember the interview on my front door step when a squat, sturdy, red-cheeked, bright-eyed Hungarian - no Dago - sat down with my consultant and me to talk over the possibilities of turning his wonderful Spring into a valley water supply - all for \$10.00!

He was shy and his English a little halting though as I was to find later unbelievably expressive. After

listening silently to the proposition in which I was by agreement to take no part he turned a humorous look on my shrewd New Englander and said, "You mean I geeve it to you?"

Then I knew he was on to us. I was to discover as the years went by that there were few times in his dealings with the countryside when he was not on to us.

The proposed water deal did not go through, but the upshot of that interview on my front door step was an association which lasted for nearly twenty-five years.

My little piece of land was not intended to be a serious proposition, rather a plaything. I had meant to let it run to seed if it wanted to. I had no stomach, or money, for a place, for improvements. I wanted something of my very own with no cares. Idle dream in a world busy in adding artificial cares to the load nature lays on our shoulders.

Things happened - the roof leaked - the grass must be cut if I was to have a comfortable sward to sit on - water in the house was imperative. And what I had not reckoned with came from all the corners of my land - incessant calls - fields calling to be rid of underbrush and weeds and turned to their proper work; a garden spot calling for a chance to show what it could do; apple trees begging to be trimmed and sprayed. I had bought an abandoned farm and it cried again to go about its business.

And then there were Possibilities. Whenever I walked abroad they sprung up in my path. If I took that shed away there would be a view worth looking at ; if I cut down that brush how it would open up the hillside; if I put a dam across the stream what a pretty pool I would have - a place for fish.

Almost before I realized it I had forgotten my notion of letting my acres go to seed while I basked in the sun, and was asking myself, "Who is there around here who can give me an occasional day - take on a field - mend a pump - care for a garden?"

Who so likely, I told myself, as that sturdy neighbor who had so deftly and simply put me and my fellow conspirator to shame? That episode proved him a person, quite the most interesting possibility in the working population of the community so far as I had seen, and it always did seem worth the while if I was hiring help to take someone with personality enough to spice the relationship. And so I went to see him. "Would he like an occasional day's work?"

Before our interview was over I found that I had stumbled on an economic situation common with the

foreign-born ambitious to till land of their own. My neighbors I discovered had been now some fifteen years in the United States, he working at odd jobs - his wife in service. With their combined savings they had bought a hundred and fifty long neglected acres, but after paying for them they had little money for horses, cows, tools, repairs. All that must come from day's work for others until their land was productive. And there were not so many day's work in our countryside and these were not near at hand. Clearly I might be a godsend. But he did not snap me up; he weighed the probable amount of work, wages, and, as I was acutely conscious, the sort of employer I would be. It was my nearness which was the deciding factor between me and a farmer four miles away. He could walk, have more time at home in the morning and evening, go home for lunch. 'Yes, he would come and "try it."' "

So Trup, for that was his name, took on the grass cutting, the garden making, the water problem, put in a field on shares. But here again something I had not bargained for happened. The sight of growing things, the sound and scent of hay cutting, hauling, stacking, in the barn, stirred brought back life old memories, /farming/ as I had known it in childhood - its round of activities and excitements, something new every

morning, something always on the way, a calf, colt, chicks, puppies. Why should I not relive these old joys? Be a farmer? And before I knew it I was one, that is I was going through the motions:- clearing fields, putting in crops, planting an orchard, supporting horses, a cow, a pig, a poultry yard. And the man Trup was doing everything!

As time went on I began to realize that this ^{untrained} ~~uneducated~~ man of all work/as I had thought him,had a knowledge of the land and its ways of which I ~~had~~ never dreamed. For a fact I had no real knowledge only a confident ignorance based on hasty and undigested reading of the scores of agricultural department reports I zealously collected - enough to say glibly and with show of authority, "We will do so and so." And when it turned out, as so often it did, that so and so was a failure, Trup would rather humbly explain how his father had taught him to do it back in Hungary.

"But why, why," I said, "did you not tell me, you knew how to do this thing, why did you let me go on?"

He would shake his head, "No, you laugh, American tink he know, I not talk."

I began to realize that he might, and did, in his very solid mind believe that his was a much better way, but after all since he must live in America he must learn

her ways. Above all he must not be laughed at. That he could not bear.

I saw I had a new problem, something tougher than the soil I hoped to redeem. It was to break down the inhibitions Trup's experience with Americans had created, to free his inheritance, convince him that I at least would not laugh at him. Gradually he began to believe me. He saw that I was interested, as well I might be for he was turning to my service the farm lore and ^{he had learned} practices / in one of the ^{oldest and} most highly developed ~~soil cultures on earth~~ sections of his country.

But I was discovering more. He knew how to repair, to build. He had a passion for making things look solid as they were in Hungary and smooth as in America. My rough stone effects he did not approve and longed to cover them with cement. It was to the end of his life a chief dispute between us.

I think he never got over his disapproval of the frame built house. A house should be something enduring and wood did not endure. I am sure nothing in the world would have given Trup greater joy than to have covered my New England frame farm-house with stucco, then it would be a house that looked more in accord with his ambitions for me, for he had ambitions for me - material ambitions. He quite disapproved of my casual way of taking the exterior of things.

It always hurt him that I had nothing but a Ford.

"I think it more fittinger," he told me once,
"you have a Packard."

He thought it was because I was stingy that I did not have one, for he could not get over his convictions that I was rich. Anybody that ran back and forth to New York as I was doing and anybody who now and then picked up and went on a long trip must be rich. That these were bread and butter journeys he could not understand. I was amusing myself, that was proper enough, but all the money might have been better spent on a Packard, ^{or} in covering the house with cement, in making things look solid - "more fittinger."

Trup's last vestige of suspicion of the sincerity of my respect for his ideas and ways was wiped out when I allowed him to follow his own notions for a summer house I wanted. With a little shyness he suggested a cedar frame - a thatched roof, "like the Count had " - of the Count more later. But he warned me it was not American. His joy was great when I told him to go ahead.

It was some weeks after our decision before I was again at the farm. I returned to find my summer house finished and Trup in a sweat of anxiety lest I not like it. But I did, and my exclamation, "Why, Trup, it is a dear, couldn't be better," was spontaneous and sincere - in no

sense a reassurance. Since I did like it I had to hear ^{had} in detail of each step in its creation - where he/cut the cedar for the frame - where/^{he} had found rye straw for the roof - how and why the thatch was done as it was. Then there was the long bench, its seat of cedar twigs, its back of woven willows - in form and workmanship entirely new to me. But the master-piece was in Trup's eyes the table. It was his answer to the only suggestion I had ventured, "I would like a table in the shelter - a table with a mill wheel top so set that it will turn."

I listened to a long account of the prolonged ^a and unsuccessful search he made for/mill stone. Convinced there was none to be had he set his wits to devising a substitute. And here it was:- ~~He had unearthed~~ a huge and ancient cart wheel with a heavy iron rim and big oak hub, ~~that~~ filled in between the spokes with cement and mounted on a pedestal of cedar to match the frame work under his thatched roof. And it turned - does still!

The joy he got out of doing these things was the joy of a natural craftsman of first order.

It was most interesting to watch his mind working on my little problems. I was hasty, jumping at my conclusions, wanting only to get the matter decided, out of

my way. Trup was always patient. You could see his mind going around slowly like a ponderous water wheel and always finally throwing off some practical suggestion, something that was different, native.

And when I said, "Go ahead," then would begin the process of accomplishment. He had a contempt for easy spending and had long discussions when a thing was to be done, how it could be done. If there was anything around that could be fixed for the purpose he preferred that to buying something new and if something new was to be bought what a study it was. Suppose it were a farm tool. First there was the dealers in our big town, old time dealers, trustworthy, dignified, and high priced.

To my astonishment I found Trup always knew every shop or factory where things connected with farming and building were sold or made, one whom he called the "headest man," and it was this man that he first consulted, but no "headest man" could sell him even a shovel until he canvassed all possibilities.

There were the local agencies - neighbors - to be consulted. Then there was the mail order catalogue for which he had profound regard, and then there was of course, barter; you might trade something with a neighbor. And it

was an amazement to me how he knew what the neighbors had that they might like to trade in. In all these long discussions before purchase, discussions which sometimes ran over months since I was only now and then at the place, he used an expression which has become a standard phrase in our family talk - "More cheaperer." After quality - always first - that was the essential thing to be considered - was whether this was "more cheaperer" than that!

He was constantly surprising us by a mechanical skill we had not imagined him to possess. There was Henry's insides - Henry, of course, being the Ford. I had had misgivings about his tinkering with its works, but I was to discover that as he had the makings of a first class gardener and builder so he had of a first class mechanic^{ian}. I might have devined it for I knew he had once spent a year as an unskilled worker in a great factory. It would have been impossible for him to have gone up and down among machines without figuring out for himself how their wheels went around, without getting the feel of them in his fingers. So he took naturally to Henry and all his works. I was horrified and electrified one day when I had gone to the garage to suggest that he take the car to the repair shop to find carefully arranged on the floor what looked to me like every

piece in the thing. I went away saying to myself, "that means a new Ford." It didn't seem to me that anybody outside of Dearborn could put that thing together again, but a few hours later Henry ran up to the door the squeaks all ^{at an end} gone out of him and the trouble/which had made him stop suddenly on a hill and stay there as stubborn as any mule.

~~amend~~

While all this was going on I was getting no little satisfaction in seeing that never for an hour did Trup relax his ambition to be an independent farmer. We had from the first the understanding that he must not be asked to sacrifice his essential labor to my needs. I had always preached that a proper labor-employer relation in America demands that the one who has taken advantage of his "chanct" as Trup called it, help the ambitious to find and realize their hopes. Otherwise you cripple rather than develop the Democratic scheme. So here was my "chanct" to test my theory and I took the more pride in the results because so few of my theories about farming and gardening and building were anything but comic in their results.

I saw my money doing double work - what I got out of it and what Trup got. Every dollar earned on my fields he carefully saved and after much laborious calculation invested in a new cow, a new bit of machinery, the clearing of a field.

Trup was on his way every year adding to his possessions.

The flexibility of our practices in regard to hours particularly were something of a scandal to my neighbors who held that a man hired should be required to follow a fixed schedule, otherwise you got cheated. It was common enough among them to say, "that furriner's doin' her." Nothing more amusing than their concern when the little crops we put in on shares were divided. Their conviction was that I never got my fifty percent. Of course what they did not see in interest was what I was getting/out of this unique personality with its unique background - all new to me and so the more stimulating. Nor could they see what I was getting if it were to be put purely on an economic basis, in calculating, planning, designing. That was something that I was not paying for in day's wages, something that I was glad to pay for in the only way I could which was by a certain flexibility of arrangement.

Probably Trup did take advantage of me at times but it was, I am convinced, for a reason they did not understand, would have angrily resented. After fifteen years' experience in knocking about in American towns and factories and his years' experience in building/up ^{himself} as a property owner in our community, he had concluded that the American regarded it smart to cheat, not dicker for the pleasure of dickering

but cheat and that if he was to Americanize himself, on the surface at least, he must be up to all our tricks.

When he and I became well enough acquainted to discuss the ethics of our transactions as well as our transactions with our neighbors he told me once in a burst of confidence that I was the first person who had employed him since he came to America that had not tried to cheat him. He did not look on this as any particular merit in me. Rather there was a kind of criticism in the observation. It showed me unsophisticated, not knowing the game of my country. When he did put something over on me, as my neighbors accused him of doing, it was a little like showing them and me that he did know how to play the game.

But because Trup saw me easy on him, because at times he unquestionably took advantage of me, he was always keen on making up. No hours were too long for him when we were in trouble. He would stay around after his day's work was done, do errands, help around the house. Indeed I never knew of anything that a man could do about a house that he was not willing to do - this husky farmer.

As a matter of fact he liked to stay around the house, to talk, visit, joke. Hewas an amazing talker. His language was rich in the idioms and the argot of many tongues and his pronunciations and accent, if puzzling, were still a joy

to the ear. All this came out in his story-telling. His stories nearly all ran back to the land on the Danube where his father had a farm, where he and all his brothers and sisters had been raised, and where they had a special relation to a great estate; the owner, the Count, being like a patriarch they served. He loved to boast of the elegance of the castle, of the great dinners when the lords and ladies came in their coaches, of the weeks of hunting - "and once the Emperor he there." His greatest pride was in the forests and its care. He would tell of the meticulous picking up and bunching of twigs, of the thousands of trees gone over annually to decide which should be cut, the straightening of crooked, the removal of sickly saplings, the steady planting - and for size - there were no such trees in America! Trup had a Gargantuan imagination when it came to picturing the land along the Danube.

All he asked was an audience to tell his stories to. The family and our friends gave him all he could ask in appreciation and attention, but to our Yankee neighbors

his tall tales were just pure lies, and there was much laughing and jeering at what he told. There was, too, not a little resentment that he should have felt that things were so much grander on the Danube than along the Housatonic; that our farests compared poorly with the forests he knew and that the occasional deer which ran over our fields was a small thing beside the herds that roamed in the Count's perserves, ~~and for which at stated occasions great hunts were staged by lords and ladies.~~

Of all his stories the one he loved best to tell was of a mighty and historic gambling contest between the Count and the "most gamblesome" card sharp in all Hungary. Ordinarily the Count would not have allowed the fellow in his presence but after he had stripped one after another of his friends of their possessions he concluded it was his duty to win back their losses, redeem his class. And so he invited the gambler to his Castle to play.

But the Count had been too sure of his skill. From the first he lost. He lost all his gold, all his silver, all his bonds, then his jewels, plate, furniture (according to Trup the land and the Castle were so entailed that he could not stake them) but there were plenty left, horses, cattle, sheep, cotes and yards of poultry, peacocks, pheasants, pigeons, geese,

ducks, swans and to them the Count now turned. His contestant excited by what he had won, and fearful that he lose even a turkey cock stipulated that he be allowed to count the herds and flocks and the Count agreed with the stipulation that if he did not count them all and correctly he forfeited all. And so the Count wagered all his horses, sometimes it was five hundred, sometimes one thousand, according to the exuberance of Trup's imagination at the moment - and lost, and then all his cattle and lost and then his sheep. Then his birds of every description until finally there was nothing left but his apiary. But that was one of the most famous in Europe, one from which every year the Count sold thousands upon thousands of pounds of honey and sent colonies all over the world at prices greater than ~~other~~ bees ever had brought in all history. And now the Count wagered his apiary with the promise that if the gangster won he do as he had done with the horses, cattle, sheep, pigeons, geese - count the bees, and if he failed to count them relinquish all his winnings. And he being city-bred and not knowing a bee from a peacock took the bet and won.

The keepers who had seen the rascal counting all the possessions of the estate and preparing to drive them away led him to the apiary and turned a few colonies loose, and He began to count - and the bees to sting. Mad with greed

and knowing that if he gave up the counting he lost all his winnings he persisted and so did the bees.

The end of the tragedy differed. Sometimes he dropped dead beside the hives, sometimes blinded and howling he stumbled into the forest and was never seen again.

This was but one of a large repertoire. To have such a story-teller about one's premises asking nothing better than to perform as he rested at noon or hung around after his days work was like having one's own private living Münchhausen.

As the years went on it became more and more Trup this and Trup that. What I had finally learned was that he could do or find a way to have done everything about the place. So in the end he was not only gardener, farmer, builder, chauffeur, he was banker, purchasing agent, counsellor and friend. In serving us he accomplished his own purpose. His land was under cultivation, his herd of cows, if not yet large, was first class. He had money in the bank; his sons were working at his side, husky, competent, ambitious.

But Trup was not happy. The struggle between his inherited code and that which he had come to believe to be the code of the American went on and with every year his doubt of the soundness of the ideas of his adopted land had become stronger. He had come to America believing that here

men combined to see that each had his "chanct" and he found men struggling to snatch opportunity from one and anothers hands. It was his first great disallusionment and though he admitted exceptions his conclusion was that if one did get on it was not by virtue of the fairness of others or by his own exertion - it was luck.

He never outlived his convictions that the American thought it "smart to cheat" and it made him uneasy for the country's future. He was no moralist; he was out and out a pragmatist. His objection to cheating was that it wouldn't work in the long run. "Et ketch up wid you sometime," he would say nodding somberly.

Deep in him was the inherited conviction that economic safety lies in putting away regularly enough to carry you over bad years, to take care of you when you can no longer labor. Save, and when you spend let it be for that which has value, is durable, serves its purpose. But that was not American and to his dismay he saw his sons accepting the American way. He could not arouse in them his patient care in working out things, his careful handling of money. They had taken on something of the American's impatience, more and more of the American's faith in luck, more and more his passion for "looking right." And the American's idea of "looking right" was a cheap thing. It was not looking right,

as Trup understood it, it was a shoddy something that disgusted him.

His anxiety was ceaseless when they began to want to run about when they should have been at work, to go to the movies, ask for a radio. It was not that he did not love pleasure but his way was to get it as you went along. His daily round of life was shot with gaiety. I never knew anyone who smiled so constantly as Trup in his early years with us. He had a famous smile running in a long straight line the full width of his big mouth and puckering his cheeks and nose and brow with jolly wrinkles, landing in his eyes which looked at you merry, kindly and knowing. No one ever saw another such smile, we all agreed. That is, Trup carried his fun and jollity with him, never left it behind.

But in America men did not have the jolly soul. They must go away from home for pleasure and it did not make them more content when they returned. It was wrong, this American way; it didn't work out. It wasn't working out with his boys.

But the hardest blow to his notion of America came when we went into the War. It was only then that I discovered why he had come here in the first place. He had run away to escape military service. "I tink in America, no War." And here was War invading, threatening. He talked often

in those days of War as he remembered it in Hungary, of a day when all his father's cattle were driven off for the Army, of another when they came and took the horses, stripped the graineries and then of troops distroying the fields, outting the trees.

He had his own solution for handling trouble between countries. Let the men who thought there should be a war do the fighting. It could be settled by a few, the nobles probably, since in his judgment they could^{be}/best spared - you could have a good war, a decisive one, without spoiling the country. He was entirely sincere and eloquent in his way in arguing this. Sincere enough to have decided at seventeen that for his part he would not fight in a noble-made war and so made his way over here. And now the thing for which he had fled from the Danube had found him - War had come to America. He was bitter over it; his boys were not old enough for the draft, but if America went once to war it wouldn't be long before there was another which would take the boys.

"Before long they take my horses, my cows." If he was to be in good and regular standing with this community he must buy Liberty Bonds - the Priest said he must buy. And he did it, but it was with a profoundly pessimistic notion

that that would be the last of it as far as he was concerned.

Nothing hurt him worse, I think, than the visit after the Armistice of one of our friends whom he had always especially admired; the man had come back from the other side, sound in limb, but ravished in soul, the source of his strength poisoned. He was dying with anemia.

"He seek - he die."

"Why, Trup," I exposulated, "he is tired and suffering from the misery he has seen. Time will cure that. He is sound in body, his mind is clear, he has not changed towards us."

But Trup shook his head, "No," he said, "someting dead in him. I know. War keels the heart, better he been blowed to pieces."

The War was the last and the crowning disallusionment in his attempt to make an American of himself. Henceforth he was like a man without a country so bitterly had America disappointed him and when he died it was with a deep poignant sense of defeat.