

The Free Press Short Story

Bartholomew Crab's Discovery

WILLIAM LEAVITT STODDARD

In front of Bartholomew Crab's little brown house with its separate little brown bars two men met by accident.

"He says he's got the secret," the other remarked, "and all he wants is time and money enough to work it out."

"Guess Lyman can take care of his money," remarked the man who had come from town.

"Sure you don't want a hog or two instead of a horse?" the other asked.

"Bartholomew Crab's hobby was mechanics. Ever since his own brief year in a technical school he had been buying and reading books on electricity, steam, wind-power, turbines, gas engines, etc."

"It might be some," he answered. "I'll stop in and see you on my way back."

Left alone the owner of the hogs, known as "A. K.," to distinguish him from E. L. Hart, the milk dealer, turned in at Crab's side gate and walked deliberately to the barn from which the noise had come.

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"I guess my husband has got a right to try to find perpetual motion as long as he don't squander his money on it," she had declared to a certain sharp-tongued woman.

"But there isn't any such thing as perpetual motion," declared the woman. "If no one has seen it, how do they know there isn't?"

"Good morning, Bart," said A. K. Hart, as he crossed the threshold of the shop. "How's it getting on?"

"Hello, hello, A. K.," replied the other, "glad to see you. Find a seat—anywhere; don't mind that tackle, because I ain't going to use it after all. I ought to be out after those trees of mine, but I just wanted to get this square washer fitted before I started."

A. K. looked about him curiously. It was a well-equipped shop, such as many a man with a love of tinkering and a knack of "making things" is likely to have.

"That's my latest," said Crab. "See that pointer in there? You can see better in a dark corner. It's a spintharoscope. There's a pin point of radium bromide under that, and it makes a zinc-sulphide screen on the bottom scintillate. Been going just as hard for a month."

"A. K. glued the cylinder to his eye and gazed in. He saw a black watch hand, and directly beneath it, a brilliant, incessant shower of tiny sparks and flashes of light, radiating out concentrically.

that. From the very beginning till now there has been a perpetual procession from the first protoplasm on down to you and me. You see, don't you, that the principle is sound enough. The application is still wanting."

"I came," said A. K. presently, "to see if you still wanted those hogs I asked about in the fall. You said you were kind of thinking about buying some and starting in again."

"Oh, I've got the pens," repeated Crab abstractedly. "But I don't know whether I want to waste the time on pigs just now or not. Apples keep me about as busy as I want to be—apples and this. Then my wife's got all she can do, and I don't exactly like—"

"Why, Ella spoke to me about the pigs yesterday down town," said Hart; "that's why I came."

"Is that so?" responded Crab, still abstracted. "Well, I don't know. See her. Ask her, and if she wants to, why it's all right. You see I'm right in the midst of all this—"

"Hart found Ella Crab in the kitchen and explained his errand. "He said he wasn't sure he had time," he concluded, "but seems to me that it would be a good thing for Bart to let up on that tinkering of his. Course," he added, remembering that Crab's wife would allow no disparagement of her husband, "course that radium thing is mighty interesting and all, but it doesn't seem as if it could make much of a machine go."

"It might," said the woman briefly. "It might," the man admitted. "But look here, Ella, I ain't going to argue with you about your husband. You know now I like you and Bart, and what I want to do is to help you to get him out of this fool notion."

"The woman shook her head sadly. "You're a real friend, A. K.," she said, "but you can't do anything. If only it didn't cost so much, A. K., that man of mine has spent a hundred and fifty dollars out of the savings bank in six weeks!"

"Just listen here," said Hart. "I've got a proposition. You said he's got to work it out of himself. That's sense. Now what you do is this. You buy those hogs from me on credit. When he asks you why, tell him there isn't any roddy money, and you didn't want to draw from the bank again. If I know Bartholomew Crab, that'll stir him up some."

"He repeated, "Do you really think we'd better have them?" he inquired. "Didn't you decide to last fall, and can't we feed them just as well this year as last? Haven't you seen what they're selling for—seven dollars a hundred-weight yesterday?"

"Why, what's got into you, Ella?" inquired her husband, in mild surprise. "You talk like a regular business woman. We don't need money."

"We shall soon if you buy any more radium what-you-call-it," she said. "That afternoon she was able to rouse her husband from his bench to rake out the pens and lay fresh straw in them. But he returned almost immediately to the task that interested him, most. While he made ready the sty he explained for perhaps the twentieth time to his wife "the principles," as he turned it on, which he was working. She thought that he seemed to be reassuring himself of its soundness by the repetition.

"Life is at the bottom of it," he said, "because life can replace its own energy as long as it lives, and other life is sure to follow."

"I know," said Ella, a little wearily. "You'd better clear out the other trough, too, Bart. We shall have to keep a lot of water there for those little pigs."

The live stock arrived the next morning, and thus Crab's attention was forced upon them. The pen was immediately below his shop, and one of the small porkers of playful disposition kept his brothers in an uproar of squeals. At dinner time Crab came to the house

without delay, and thoroughly upset. "I can't work with those animals under me," he said. "I've about decided I'll save time in the long run if I mend the pens down by the creek. The ones father built. That I can work in quiet."

"It will be better for the pigs, too, dear," said his wife. Secretly she was glad of his annoyance, but she of course did not show it.

The old pens required more repairing. Lumber had to be purchased. This took time, attention, and more than that, it brought home to Crab as nothing else could, the fact that he might become a poor man. He now first learned that the hogs had been bought on credit, and distressed at the idea of owing anyone money, he drew again from the savings bank in spite of his wife's objections.

"You're a scientific man and a farmer, I believe, Mr. Crab," said a young city man to him one day. He was a newcomer who had recently bought a farm next to Bartholomew's. "What do you know about alfalfa for hog feed? I've read that they're doing great things with it, and I thought you would be the best man to tell me, as I see you've some fine pigs. Has it food elements which ordinary grass hasn't, or is it merely cheaper, or what? I want to know from an authority."

Crab, thus questioned one morning in his workshop, felt ashamed to have to admit ignorance. "I can't say," he replied. "I've never looked into that. Why don't you ask A. K. Hart down the road? I got my hogs from him."

The incident, slight as it was, brought a revelation to Crab. He had been appealed to as a scientific man, and what had he done to earn his title? Surely the chaotic mess which was cluttering up his workbench was no warrant. In his apple-growing he had done practically nothing but keep the trees pruned and well, and pick and barrel the fruit in the fall. He had not experimented in any way with apples. Now, being asked a question the answer to which was a commonplace with most men, he had been forced to confess his ignorance, and this to a man who had scarcely shaken the dust of the city from his shoes, who was laughed at in town as a "dude farmer." He at least showed that he was awake.

Bartholomew Crab had worked thoroughly to give him his true credit on her perpetual-motion theory. And just as he had put his heart and spirit into that labor, so now, spurred by his debts, the wound to his pride, and by the feeling that his wife was expecting it of him, he turned his attention to hogs. He wrote to Washington for the literature of the Department of Agriculture. He talked with Hart. He visited the markets, and later in the year the county fair, where one of his young hogs won a minor prize. By the end of September he had fairly "made good" with this sty. The apples took what extra time the pigs did not. But when the rush was over, to his wife's sorrow and the mystification of Hart, he returned to his bench in the workshop, where he spent practically every evening.

"One night Hart dropped in on his way back from town. The room was much the same as it always had been. The batteries stood on the workbench as before, and the two retorts still held the whitish liquor, which, however, had stopped effervescing. The little brass cylinder was gone. Crab was figuring and writing on paper, referring constantly to some books.

"Still at it?" asked Hart as he entered. Crab raised his head. "Still at what?" he inquired, smiling. "Perpetual motion," replied the other, exploring among the things on the bench. "Where's the radium apparatus?"

"In the house," he replied. "My wife's been kind of interested in it lately. "You don't mean to say that she's going to start in on this racket?" asked the other. "I thought Ella—"

"A. K.," said Crab slowly, "I want you to listen to what I'm going to say. I've got the secret! I've got perpetual motion or as near as a human being can ever come to it, I guess. Remember what I told you—that it would be like life—must replace its own energy, and so on?"

"Hart nodded. "On this sheet of paper," said Crab, "is my scheme for a perpetual motion of the kind of perpetual motion I've discovered. It's my programme for enlarging my hog farm. I've kind of decided that I've got the foundations of a pretty good little business already started. What pigs I sell will be replaced by those that are born, and so on. During accidents, that's good enough perpetual motion for me."

"Then do you mean to say," exclaimed the other, rising in his surprise, "that you've quit all this—"

"I do, my friend. But I don't mean to say anything to Ella till to-morrow, because that's her birthday, and I want to make a present to her of a very, very wise husband. And the funny thing, A. K.," he continued to his friend, "is that everybody except me discovered the secret long ago!"

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SLATS DIARY BY ROSS FARQUHAR

Friday—pa let a nother Boner get threw the paper witch he wrks on today. He rote about mr. Blunt a going to the hospittle to be treated for. Rye trubble, and then they was a edditorial witch menchined that the last election was the voice of the Populous witch wanted evry buddy to have a chance for loving.

Saturday—Ant Emmy Just cum home from a Reception over across the creek and when ma sat her whut kinda time she had she, sed it was a grade deal like a Wake oney they didden have very much fun at the reception.

Sunday—ma called on Mrs. Wise today whilch husband fell and broke his leg when he was hanging paper on Saturday. When ma simpalaised with her she thanked me and then told about her husband, braking her new Bridge lamp when he fell and she bust out in tears when she thot of that.

Monday—Fillus Berry got a divorce from her husband an Ant Emmy sed they oney ben married for three weeks. They seemed like as if they wood be a Ideal cupple but when they settled down Fillus found out her dog didden like her husband.

Tuesday—a ole friend of pa witch is a Republican was here at are house for supper. He sed he was thankful for I thing and pa says what is that you are thankful for and he replied and sed, I am mitley thankful the Democrats didden nominate a strong Candydiate.

Wednesday—Joe Hix didden he wood be a Bandit so he a plyed for a permit to carry a Machine gun becu he didden want to get into trouble but he didden get the Permit so he has give it up.

Thursday—Pa says he hopes his time to die will cum when they is a Pallitice campane on and mebbly if they is a speech on the radio it wont be so hard to go.

THE PRODIGAL

A young woman remonstrated with her husband, a spendthrift. "Don't worry, my dear, I am like the Prodigal Son. I shall return some day," he said. "I will be like the Prodigal Son, too," she retorted. "For I shall arise and go to my father."

A FAMILY TRAIT

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All persons having claims against the estate of Edwin Atkinson, deceased, who died on or about the eighteenth day of March, 1932, are notified to send to the undersigned Administrator, The Trusts and Guarantee Company, Limited, Toronto, or to the undersigned Kenneth M. Langdon, its Solicitor, on or before the first day of December, 1932, their names and addresses and full particulars of their claims, and the nature of the securities (if any) held by them, duly verified by statutory declaration. Immediately after the said first day of December, 1932, the assets of the said deceased will be distributed among the parties entitled thereto, having regard only to the claims of which it shall then have notice. Dated October 31st, 1932. THE TRUSTS AND GUARANTEE COMPANY, LTD. 122 Bay Street, Toronto. KENNETH M. LANGDON, Georgetown and Acton, Solicitor for the said Administrator.

CATTLE MOVEMENT SLOWER

The current issue of the Live Stock Market and Meat Trade Review published by the Dominion Live Stock Branch contains the following review of live stock movement for the first nine months of the current year. "Shipments of cattle from western to eastern Canada this year for the first nine months show as 57,740, as compared with 67,885 a year ago, or over 100,000 fewer. The movement indicates that 13,804 went direct to feed lots, a decrease of about 5,300 head; 30,859 went to stock yards, a decrease of 1,600 head; and 13,077 went direct to packing plants, a decrease of 3,117 head, when compared with the movement for the same period of last year. The movement from the west to the east for the month of September only totalled 1,688 head, or 4,367 less than for September, 1931. The decreases were due to smaller shipments to feed lots and stock yards in the east."

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