

# BACKWOODS MYSTERY

I DON'T know what to think of it, ma," said Harry Blakely, as he entered the house, with an anxious look upon his face, and carefully hung his rifle in its place on hooks near the open fireplace.

"I don't know what to think of it," he repeated. "That's the third time that writer, whatever it is, has been around here this week, and every time it has come a cow or some other domestic animal has been killed by it. It's not a bear, that's certain, for a bear don't make tracks in the snow like a wolf; and yet it ain't a wolf, for the wolf don't live that dare come alone into the clearing and attack the cattle. I'm clean beat out, and it begins to look as though we'd have to do something desperate if we expect to save any of our stock."

Mr. Blakely was one of the pioneers of northern Wisconsin, having but a year before moved into the country with his wife and 9-year-old boy, from Illinois. He had been forced to leave Illinois because his farm had been taken from him on a mortgage. His present home consisted of a small log cabin at the edge of a clearing, perhaps thirty rods across, from which the timber had not long before been cut. The place was anything but a palace, but it was a home, and this satisfied the pioneers, who were willing to wait for better times.

Of late dire misfortune had fallen upon the family, and also upon the other residents of the scattering settlement. With the winter had come a strange animal, which had not yet been seen by any one, but which had made its presence felt by killing stock and prowling about the cabins at night in anything but a reassuring manner.

All efforts to hunt down the animal had proved of no avail, and scarcely a night passed but the settlement was "dotted" by the unknown terror and stock killed. The pioneers had tracked the animal to a rocky ledge along the Bruie river, now noted as a trout stream, but here all trace ended as completely as though the animal had taken wings and flown into the air.

"Can't you set a trap and catch the animal?" asked little Johnnie Blakely of his father, after the latter had put the rifle in its proper place and was describing to his wife the great damage the unknown creature was doing in the neighborhood. According to Blakely the animal was endowed with what seemed to be almost human cunning and kept out of sight of the hunters in a manner that was at once strange and terrifying.

"A trap's no use," replied Blakely, moodily. "The brute knows too much to run into any trap. It seems as though it were the Evil One himself," and with a scowl on his face the father turned to his supper.

The whole settlement was in a state of terror and but few dared venture from their cabins at night, for fear of the unknown creature, which could be heard now and then in the woods, giving vent to long-drawn howls, which ended in a curious, half-human cry.

Search after search was made for the animal, but without success. The winter wore on, and at the opening of spring there was not a settler in the region who was not a heavy loser from the depredations of the animal, which



PULLED THE TRIGGER.

some declared was a panther, while others insisted that it must be an Indian devil, the woodsman's name for an animal of the cat family which inhabits the north woods.

There was a standing reward of \$50 for the head of the unknown beast, and the amount seemed like a fortune to little Johnnie, who often thought how delightful it would be if he could only earn all this money. As he lay in his bed that night little did he dream that before many days he would earn the reward and win praise from the settlers for his coolness and bravery.

One Sunday afternoon while Johnnie was alone in the house, his father and mother having gone to the village to attend a meeting in the church, he heard a commotion among the cattle, which were enclosed in a small house near the house. On looking from the door the boy saw an animal about the size of a large dog, only longer and more active, making an attack upon a half-grown cow, which was bellowing piteously as she endeavored to escape from the creature.

The animal had evidently jumped upon the cow from behind and was tearing at the animal's neck, from which the blood was pouring in a stream. For an instant Johnnie was powerless to move, for he realized that before him was the unknown brute which had been causing so much trouble among the settlers.

Slowly his senses returned to him, and cautiously he took his father's rifle, which he knew to be loaded, from its

resting-place on the wall, and then moved back to the doorway. Resting the heavy rifle across a chair there, he silently waited for the marauder to move a trifle to the right, so that a better shot could be had.

After tearing at the unfortunate cow until she sank lifeless to the ground the panther—for panther the animal proved to be—ate its fill of the quivering flesh and then slowly turned toward the house. As the great cat saw the boy, kneeling in the doorway and trembling with excitement and fear, it gave a snarl and crouched low, moving its tail rapidly from side to side, its eyes shining like living coals in the dark.

With a murmured prayer, Johnnie took a quick aim and pulled the trigger. The animal gave a leap into the air toward the boy, uttered a savage scream of rage, which echoed far and wide, and fell back dead, with a bullet in its brain. It was some minutes before Johnnie dared approach the fallen creature and when he did he was more than astonished to find around its neck a broad, leather strap, which had evidently been placed there by human hands.

While Johnnie was wondering what it all meant and how the strap came there, Mr. and Mrs. Blakely drove up. The mother was too frightened to speak, as she gazed at the dead panther and thought of the danger in which her boy had been placed. The father, after making a critical examination of the animal and the collar around its neck, at once set out for the home of his nearest neighbor.

On his return he announced that the mystery of the panther would probably be cleared up on the morrow, as a party intended to make a search for the lair of the animal and find if it were to be found. Little Johnnie pleaded to be allowed to accompany the party, but could not gain consent, as his mother entered a firm and emphatic protest.

In the early morning hounds were secured and a small party of the settlers took up the trail of the panther. It led to the ledge of rocks on the Bruie river, where the animal had successfully hidden so many times when pursued by the hunters. This time the hounds kept the scent and it was found that the home of the creature had been in a cave almost hidden from sight, which could only be reached by leaping over a deep cut in the rocks.

As the party entered the den, which ran back into the rocks for some distance, the smell of smoke greeted their nostrils. Almost too much astonished to speak, the men slowly advanced and at last came to the five. Near it was seated a half-breed Indian, fondling two small panther cubs, evidently the young of the female which had been killed the day before by Johnnie Blakely.

The Indian jumped to his feet as the men, with their rifles at their shoulders, approached, and made a dash for the opening of the cave. He never reached it, for a rifle was discharged, probably accidentally, in the excitement of the moment, and the half-breed fell on his face, blood pouring from a terrible wound in his chest.

Everything possible was done for the sufferer, but it was seen that he was mortally wounded. As he was placed tenderly near the fire on a pile of furs he gasped painfully once or twice and then spoke. He had come into the neighborhood the previous fall, he said, bringing with him the female panther, which he had captured and tamed in Michigan.

In this cave he had lived alone, with only his savage pet for a companion. Here the cubs had been born and he was endeavoring to train them as he had trained their mother—to kill and bring to him whatever came in her path. Human bones were found in the cave, but when the half-breed's body was taken to the settlement, along with the cubs, no mention of these bones was made by the men, who decided that no good could come from it.

The body was given a decent burial; the cubs were killed after being on exhibition for a few days, and the reward of \$50 was paid to Johnnie Blakely, who is now a business man in a Wisconsin city and who highly prizes an old-fashioned muzzle-loading rifle and a tattered panther-skin rug, which occupy positions of honor in his home.

"Was he who related to me the story as here given. Nothing was ever learned concerning the identity of the half-breed, although inquiries were made, and it is more than probable that he had been more or less crazy, had raised the old panther from a cub and had wandered from Michigan over into Wisconsin, as he said.

### Can't See the Joke.

Here is the serious manner in which a big London daily and a sedate London magistrate treated an old-time American joke: "A strange society was brought to light during the hearing of a case before the Thames magistrate. Several men were charged with stealing a watch from a sailor and all discharged except Alexander Fullerton, on whom were found a post-office savings bank book for £49 and a card of membership with a curious title. It bore the following inscription: 'National Liars' Association. Having been a member of the above association, and finding you a bigger liar than myself, I must congratulate you on relieving me of this card.' It must be gratifying to the East end community, as well as a tribute to Fullerton's own abilities, that he found no one worthy of relieving him of the card." The magistrate remanded him for inquiries.

His Wild Prophecy More Than Fulfilled. Joseph Bell, the engineer of Stephenson's Rocket, has recently died at the age of 83. He heard Stephenson make the wild prophecy that trains would run at fifteen miles an hour, and lived to run a train for hundreds of miles at more than a mile a minute.

# FARM AND GARDEN.

## MATTERS OF INTEREST TO AGRICULTURISTS.

Some Up-to-Date Hints About Cultivation of the Soil and Yields Thereof—Horticulture, Viticulture and Floriculture.



DISCUSSING recently the relative profit of grain and grass in England, the Live Stock Journal states as a fact that the land in question—a part of Lord Leicester's estate—is valued at an annual rental of "no more than 7 shillings an acre till the free, at the present time." This would be only \$1.75 an acre, with local taxes paid by the landlord. If this is anything near a fair sample of English rents for averaging farming, it would seem to leave a fair margin for the renter. It would be considered a very low rent for good land in this part of Ontario; and our best land, well cultivated, on shares, will pay the owner several times that much.

One trouble with English farming is that the methods are antiquated and the expenses too great. The results are good, so far as yield is concerned—much better than the average in Ontario—but the labor bill is proportionally higher. While labor is cheaper there, the labor cost of a bushel of wheat, or a ton of hay, or a pound of butter is more in England than in this country. We don't produce so much per acre; but we produce more—probably two or three times as much per hand. Here is where the English farmer is handicapped much more than in the rent he pays. It is a matter of regret that it is so. English farming should be a very attractive business, with a reasonable margin of profit. It gives employment and support to a much larger population proportionately than ours; and a better support to or at least a more dignified and more leisurely life for the farmer himself than in any other country. It will be a matter of profound regret if he is forced by competition to adopt the high pressure system of work, and the low scale of living which is too common here. But apparently he must do that or abandon the business, at the present price of agricultural produce, to pay the present labor bill, support the manager, or farmer, in his present style of living, and leave any thing at all for rent.—Farm and Home.

### Setting Apple-trees.

(From the Farmers' Review.) In reading your issue of December 11 I struck a very interesting article on "Planting Orchards" signed "William Gray." While his article contains many excellent points which I most freely endorse, it contains one that I would most seriously condemn, viz.: "The tree top should incline to the west several inches." He further states that the prevailing winds are from the west and that nearly all the orchard trees are found leaning east. This may be the case with him, but in all this great northwest the prevailing winds are from the northwest and our trees lean, not to the east, but to the northeast. I have examined thousands of orchards in Wisconsin, Minnesota and Iowa and have almost invariably found the older trees leaning and growing to the northeast. He says they lean east by west winds. I claim to have any amount of evidence in our township that they lean northeast and not from the force of wind from the southwest, but from the direct rays of the sun. This I reported in our book report of 1878. When everybody claimed this leaning was caused by the southwest winds I took a bold stand then and was considered much beside myself by my best friends, who tried then to keep me from arguing the question there, as it would be sure to expose my ignorance. It is impossible with the limited space I am given to branch off and reason all these points in one short article, but if objected to by any I will try to make my position as clear as sunshine. We have eight orchards in our grove here on the east side, open on the east, closely shut in on the south and west by tall timber. All these trees lean seriously to the northeast except the row that stands near the grove on the south side of the field. The trees in the west side row, too, are found nearly upright, caused by the shade they receive from the sun by the grove. If anyone doubts my position let him go about and examine and he will be most thoroughly convinced by his own convictions. I do not say the southwest winds never set the trees over to the northeast. The wind does this sometimes, but not any oftener than they are set over to the southeast by the northwest wind. These are exceptions to the general rule.

I have found trees leaning in every conceivable direction. But as a rule they lean and grow to the northeast. The time was when this talk was called Gaylord's theory and weighed little. At this time (in 1879) I wrote to a noted professor in Michigan to learn what caused our trees to lean or grow over to the northeast. His reply was then it was caused by the heavy southwest winds. This was about seventeen years ago, but I venture to say now that not a professor in the northwest could be found to utter such a conclusion. If there are any we hope they will come to the rescue, as this old-fogy notion is now most thoroughly exploded.

The best I can do in this short article is to state a few facts very briefly and defer the rest till some future reply. A tree standing erect and in the open sun without anything to prevent the direct rays from striking its trunk will be injured and barbed at just half past one.

No time-piece could show more truly. But if a tree leans from the sun, from any time from sunrise till sunset, the dead line will appear on top or facing the sun. There are unnumbered amounts of evidence, even in our own township, to prove this beyond all possible doubt. These being facts, then how shall we set our trees so as to best make them self-protecting? We all set our trees here (now) leaning to the sun at about 1 o'clock—not later. Up till quite recently we have been setting and advising setting at half-past 1. This is a little too much, we think, as we now find here and there trees that have been set over as far as 2 and 3, and in almost every case trees thus grown will show injury, even as far east as sunrise or from 8 in the morning. There were a few trees in a small plot I found years ago leaning, one northwest barked on southeast, one leaning north barked on south, one leaning southeast barked on southwest; one stood close to the north side of the fence, stood upright and sound. This gave me evidence in a nutshell; and since I have examined thousands of trees and universally find the same conditions, producing the same effect. Set leaning to 1—no later—and don't you forget it. Edson Gaylord.

### Rennet.

The most important factors in cheese manufacture are the preparation and use of rennet; next that rennet be of the proper sort. Ten or twelve years ago rennets brought as high as 50 cents apiece. Today the majority of them sell for only ten cents apiece. What has caused such a decline in prices? Because home made rennets, generally far superior to those of which I am about to treat, figuratively speaking, are going out of date.

American farmers are acquiring the habit of using a great many imported rennets. They are especially used in large factories. They are generally marked "Bavarian," whether they came from Bavaria or not, for not all of them came from that country any more than they do from the requisite kind of animals. Swine, sheep and goats furnish not a small number of the cheap rennets on the market. These being often poorly packed and then neglected so that they become both wormy and mouldy, cannot help affecting the quality of the cheese.

An experienced cheese-maker, of course, may have had luck occasionally, just the same as the farmer's wife with her butter. Pure milk and good rennet, however, are the principal things to commence with. The chief difficulty lies in what is termed alkaline bacteria, which possesses the power to melt the caseine, and thus deprives a considerable amount of the solids from entering into the composition of the cheese.—Albany Journal.

"Small Farmers."—I find this is a phrase which is disliked by many, but it is better to be a good and successful small farmer than an unthrifty and unsuccessful large farmer. We often see business men begin in a limited way and do well until they get aspiring. No sooner have they made a little money than they spread out, buy a larger stock of goods, partly or chiefly on credit, and indulge in "great expectations" which fail of realization. Many a man can manage a smaller business who gets out of his depth when he tries to conduct a larger one. Or, in the fluctuations of trade, the times are not so good, he cannot sell the larger stock he has got together; before times improved many articles become unfashionable and go down in value, and the issue is bankruptcy. In like manner, many farmers who succeed in a small way, go into this, that, and the other thing until they get a bigger burden on their shoulders than they can carry.

A Gas Tree.—A gas tree was discovered in the southern part of Washington county, Pa., in a very curious way. Hunley Gooch and his son were chopping down an old and hollow tree, when they thought as they struck into the hollow that they smelled the odor of gas. The son struck a match and applied it to the hollow, which the ax had opened. Instantly there was an explosion and the young man had difficulty in escaping without serious injury. The tree continued to burn until its bark was burned off. The ax, which was left in the tree, had its handle burned. It is likely that digging near where the tree stood will show a large and valuable supply of gas. It is likely that the gas in the tree had been slowly accumulated through apertures in the soil not big enough to release a large quantity at a time.—Ex.

Roots of Clover.—A German authority says that the root and stubble of a good crop of red clover weigh over three tons per acre when air dry and contain 180 pounds of nitrogen, 77 pounds of phosphoric acid and 77 pounds of potash, all of which is placed, when turned under, in the most available form for growing crops. We call attention particularly to the large demand which clover makes on the soil for potash and phosphoric acid. If the resulting crops are removed from the soil one can easily see how clover can be used for soil robbing as well as restoring fertility. It is this fact that has given rise to the English proverb, "Clover without manure makes the father rich and the children poor."

Forest and Prairie Fires.—A great menace to farming in the west are the forest and prairie fires. Farmers have got to learn that every big fire does immense damage to their growing crops; it heats the air, and dries up the surface so that water will roll off it and not be absorbed by it. Burning the straw and cornstalks on the field is one of the worst practices that farmers can adopt, and they reap the evil results of it every time. Vegetable matter burnt is lost, but when turned under the soil it is not only saved, but it makes the soil more porous so that water can sink down into it. Ex-

Thought He Had Quit. Colonel McLaughlin sent his Swedish foreman out a few days ago to do some work around the mouth of an old mining shaft, and he took a green countryman with him as an assistant. In a couple of hours the foreman walked up to the colonel's office and remarked: "Say, colonel, I want anudder man." "Why, what's the matter with that man sent out with you?" inquired the colonel. "Oh, he fall down de shaft 'bout an hour ago, an' he don't come up. I tink he jumped his job."—San Francisco Post.

### High, Low, Jack.

Fine ice means very cold weather, then comes a high old time in skating rinks, and skating ponds, on slides and rides, and we go home tired and overheated. It's the same old story of cooling off; off with wraps and on with all sorts of aches and pains, rheumatic, neuralgic, sciatic, lumbago, including frost-bites, backache, even toothache. They who dance must pay the piper. We cut up Jack and are brought low by our own folly. What of it, the dance will go on all the same. It is generally known that St. Jacobs Oil will cure all such aches and pains separately or collectively, and the cry is on with the dance.

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