

Spring and June on Cow Path Lane

On Cowpath Lane

The children grew. (With what joy I cut up the coat of my wedding suit to make Margaret her first little-girl coat). With their little tin cups in hand they would follow their Dad to the barn and would drink warm milk fresh from the cows. They always had a row of carrots in the garden, right next to the fence. Many's the time I have seen Margaret in apron and Jack in overalls plod up and down that row, pulling carrots, rubbing the dirt off with grimy hands, and eating them as though they were candy. "Getting the children to eat" was never a problem in our family. The problem, if anything, was getting something and enough of it prepared for the children to eat.

We lived a rich, full life. Of course, Dad had his troubles wrestling with the mortgage, the crops, the bugs, the weather, and markets. I had my hands full with the house, garden, chickens, sewing, laundry, canning, and such, but in emergency or rush we could always help each other.

I learned to drive four mules to a harrow in planting time and to ride the binder at harvest. Alex would help me on wash-day when the tub was too full or he would peel peaches or snap beans at canning time.

Our life was simple but never dull. On a farm where there are animals and children one learns to live in constant anticipation. It was the children's great joy to follow their Dad to the field. They'd trot along behind him in the furrow when he plowed, and the chief pleasure at end of day was to be permitted to ride home on the mules or horses.

Pat and Will were team mates. Their gray Percheron backs were as broad as our kitchen table and Margaret and Jack were delighted to be hoisted atop one or both horses to ride to the barn. The children seemed so small and their mounts so large that Dad said they looked like a couple of horseflies up there.

One day Margaret came to the house in tears. Her dress was torn! Her dress was torn! That was all I could learn of the reason for her tears. And Jack had done it, had torn her favorite dress. She was inconsolable.

Dad came in chuckling, but nervous nevertheless. He explained that the two children had been riding Old Will, Margaret in front, holding the reins, Jack behind, holding onto Margaret. Clumsy Old Will stumbled; Jack began to slip; he caught Margaret's dress, but that did not keep him from falling to the ground, taking part of Margaret's dress with him. She never forgave him for the loss of that skirt.

Like most children at sometime in their lives, Margaret and Jack yearned for a pony. And after that tumble from Old Will's back we felt that at least from a pony they wouldn't have so far to fall. A neighbor whose children had outgrown their pony, Prince, loaned him to us, and our own two were delighted. They curried, petted, and pampered him all summer.

That autumn when Margaret was eight and Jack was six they begged to ride Prince to school. We doubted that it was wise, and considered long before giving consent. It did seem simpler, though, than taking them and going for them every day in the flivver, but still I was uneasy. Finally we decided that they might try it if Dad went with them a few times to show Prince the way. So with the two children on Prince, and Dad on Old Will, the school year began.

Prince would plod back and forth over the country dirt road with little need of guiding—would plod daily, that is, except on cloudy days! On those days, no matter how far along toward school he might be when a cloud came up, Prince would deliberately turn around and trot back home with the children; or if he was already at school when a cloud appeared, he would slip his bridle and head for home, sans riders.

We suspected that the children offered little argument when Prince decided not to go all the way to school. So when the three of them came back into the yard in the middle of the morning after I thought they were safe in school, I would fasten Prince

in the stable, give the children each a dose of castor oil, and put them to bed.

One day, remembering the castor oil, the children succeeded in getting Prince to school, caught him in the act of slipping the bridle, and secured him with a rope to a fence until school was out. It was at about that time that the bottom seemed to drop out of the sky. Knowing of the lack of protection for the children, Dad and I started toward the school in the flivver. It was a soaked trio we found halfway home. Jack with red hair plastered to his forehead, Margaret with silk pongee dress plastered to her skin, and Prince coming as-near-showing disgust as a so-called dumb animal could.



Bobwhite

Not only the family pets were comedians and actors. The farm animals, too, could give us amusement and tragedy.

The clown of our farm at one time was a fat, mischievous little white pig. He and several brothers and sisters arrived one night during zero weather. By the third day, he alone was left to see the sunshine—and he had lost the outer two thirds of his tail. Because of his misfortune and his color, we called him Bobwhite.

He became the pet of the place. He got the choice table scraps that the hens should have had. He got every drop of milk that

was left over from family use. He had shelled corn spread out before him until he had to sit down to eat. Of course any pig will lie down and roll over when someone picks up a corn cob and scratches him, but Bobwhite rolled over when he saw anyone start toward him with a cob; he did not wait to be scratched down.

Any pig can find a hole in the fence and go out it, but Bobwhite was so much more intelligent than ordinary pigs he could find the same hole in the fence and come back to the barn through it when Buppo started after him. The two, Buppo and the pig, were great pals when Buppo was not playing policeman. They ate corn together, basked in the sun, and slept side by side. But when the pig went where he shouldn't, Bup did his doggish duty to bring him home again. Of course, we couldn't bear to make bacon of that pig that fall.



Henry the Eight

No story about the farm yard would be complete without the Soothing Saga of Henry the Eight.

Henry was our big, bad, frightened, frightful, pawing, and bellowing bull. Perhaps I should spell that last word with a capital B. We felt that way about him. For Henry had horns! We treated Henry with Respect, for Henry had a Disposition.

Ordinarily I hate to see man or beast with a ring in his nose, but many a time I breathed a prayer of thanksgiving for Henry's. More than once, that ring was a life-saver for either Henry or his handler. Sometimes that wasn't enough, though. He persistently charged every creature in his sight, and jumped every fence in his path.

The important part of this story is a piece of tin, one about eight by twelve or twelve by fourteen inches, or at any rate, a piece of tin just a little larger than Henry's face. This invention of a desperate owner was designed to serve as behavior-modification for Henry—or soothe him, whichever served.

With the ring securely in his nose, and a rope in the ring, and the rope tied to the fence, and Henry on the other side of the fence, we fitted the tin crosswise his forehead, noggin, or whatever you call the space below the horns on an impatient papa cow; then we clipped the lower two corners slightly so he could see his grass, feed and water. Next we punched holes in the tin, top and bottom, and with soft wrapped wire fastened the scrap of tin to the horns above and the halter below. Finally we sprayed Henry's back, chin, nose, and ankles for flies, gave him a pat on the head for the good behavior we expected from him from then on, and turned him loose.

Henry was like a calf again. He "talked" about his troubles, his handicap, his blindfold, or whatever the scrap of tin might be called. He pawed and bellowed. Very likely what he was trying to tell the world was "a woman's to blame for this."

Henry was really and truly a masculine creature. But we thought he would not try to jump a fence or charge a man he could not see. And that is just what proved to be the case.



The Calf that Made a Pig of Himself

Did you ever see a little Ferdinand try to make a pig of himself—literally, I mean? Well, we had one of those, too.

He was Lady's little calf, a well-bred rascal with the blood of famous Jerseys in his veins, but that didn't keep him from wanting at every opportunity to put a pig's dinner in his tummy.

From the time he was three days old he'd had only a tin pail for a mother. But as soon as the old red sow found pigs, things were different.

There were only eleven pigs. But little Pogis Ferdinand decided that the mother needed more, so he stepped in and made it a twelve-some. He took the back teat on the right-hand side if the pigs were present. But when he found the mother out in the pasture alone, he began with that teat and went from left to right until, well, the eleven little pigs had no supper.

They had to take up board and lodging in the plum-thicket until we discovered what it was all about and moved the old sow out of Ferdinand's pasture.



June Rambling

One mid-June Sunday morning, feeling the need of getting closer to Divinity than I could get sitting behind a neighbor's hat in a church pew, I suggested, with selfish intent, that instead of the whole family piling into the old Model T and jogging off to church and Sunday School in the usual fashion, we make it a do-as-you-please Sunday, and let each one spend the morning as he liked or according to his own dictates. The family agreed.

Jack and Daddy went to church. Margaret tucked a book under one arm and her cat under the other, and retired to her own room—a room selected because of its farawayness, upstairs at the back of the house, where she could see no people and hear no telephone. Uncle Fayette chose to sit on the woodpile and smoke his “homemade.”

I picked up two books—not to read, but just for company. One was a book of Psalms, the other of poetry. I had a pencil and pad for sketching and note-taking, if I felt inclined, which I probably wouldn't. With Buppo at heel, I wandered off down our semi-private country lane.

It was one of those rare June mornings when one could wear a sweater or leave it at home. There was beauty in everything, even in the seed-balls of wild garlic and in the feathery blooms of Johnson grass—both of which were regarded as nuisances supreme in our neighborhood.

Queen Anne's lace held fairy umbrellas over the gently nodding heads of clover ladies. The Judas tree held a red

heart—one which seemed ready to burst—on the tip of every branch. Always before, the Judas tree had been “redbud” and the “hearts” had been merely reddish new leaves, but on this mid-June morning they were hearts. And the coloring of the Judas tree leaves! Do you remember those beautiful “change-able taffetas” that our elders used to wear? Somehow, the colors of the redbud leaves (red and green all beautifully mixed together) reminded me of those taffetas. I always wanted one of those scintillating silks.

It seems too bad that they ever put such a name as Judas tree on our redbud bushes. It seems unfair to give such a beautiful shrub such a stigmatic name. Anyway, it seemed that the Judas tree reached hearts to passers-by and across the road on that June morning, and at any time it favored us with more than the usual run-of-the-mill roadside beauty, whether in twig, or leaf, or bloom.

Look sometime at the leaves of a so-called wild rose. Its unopened buds in their clusters are favorites with Dame Nature and one of the loveliest of all her bright June children.

It is interesting to notice how roadside plants and woods-dwellers seem to help one another. Near the hackberry and wild rose bush, a trumpet vine was entwining itself in a cedar and neither had ever seemed so beautiful before. Underneath them, adolescent blackberries clustered about the mother branch like bees around an apple core.

To enjoy to the fullest a country road on a June morning, one should not motor nor ride horseback. It is better if one merely walks; the best plan is to loiter leisurely—no place to go, no time to get there—but time to stop, look, move a bit, stop again, and perhaps retrace.

Time may be taken on these rambling walks for communion, so I reached for the rich ripe fruit of the vine, the raspberry vine, then later the dewberry vine, and finally I tasted a blackberry that was half-past red. Next I noticed a plum thicket in a fence corner, and took time to fill my hands and pockets with juicy red and yellow fruit.

Then I did just what you would have done: selected the most comfortable looking mossy rock I could find, one close to an inviting tree trunk, sat down, leaned back, and just looked.

Sitting on a rock by a roadside, just looking, is good medicine. It is recommended for blues, for bewilderment, for jitters. In fact, sitting on a rock in a quiet, woodsy place is good for whatever ails you—unless, perhaps, the rock is damp and your complaint be rheumatism.

Sitting there I watched birds carrying dead grass, feathers, and worms, and heard them chirp, chatter, and apparently gossip among themselves. Sometimes one would be so filled and thrilled with that June day and all the world in general, he'd simply have to take a high limb and bubble over with song. I watched an old grandfather squash bug—he must have measured an inch from tail to nose—repose with dignity

on a horseweed leaf. A brown and yellow butterfly seemed motionless in the air. A bee buzzed like a fly in a country parlor. “Busy as a bee!” That reminded me that I had left the breakfast dishes unwashed! And the sun, getting high enough to beam down on my rock, reminded me that it was time to put beans on for dinner.

Still with the book of Psalms and the one of more mundane poetry unopened, with no sketching done and no notes made, I rose stiffly from the rock and sauntered back toward home. I wondered as I went how the same sun that puts the pink in the rose, the juice in the plum, the sugar in the berry, the song in the heart of a bird, also puts the squirm in the snake and the urge of the chigger to get under one’s skin.

Sitting on a rock, by a woodsy roadside, is definitely conducive to chigger culture, I found. So still with Bup at heel, I rambled toward home, to wash the dishes, to put on the beans—and to dip a small piece of rag in the kerosene-can for chigger medicine.



A Wardrobe of Cats

DUMPLING

During the years the children were growing up the farm had a continuity of cat life. When Margaret was small there came into the household an almost brand new kitten. This small cat

was deserted in babyhood by a delinquent mother and left to starve on our barn doorstep.

For a while the kitten was reared with a silver spoon in its mouth. I don't mean that the spoon was kept there constantly, but that it was inserted regularly and often enough to keep the orphan growing and to help her develop into a healthy and well-mannered cat.

This first cat in our family was named Dumpling. She was as black as night, except for one white spot under her chin and one white foot. She looked as though she had one shoe off and reminded us of the jingle:

“Diddle, diddle dumpling, my son John,
One shoe off and one shoe on...”

So Dumpling she was and Dumpling she remained throughout all the years our babies carried and dragged her about unprotestingly by the “handle,” otherwise known as tail.

We had resolved to teach our children kindness and sympathy for dumb animals and began with Margaret and Dumpling, but children of her age are more likely to obey impulse and notion than parents and the S.P.C.D.A.

One cold January afternoon, just before supper, I was bringing in wood and water for the night and next day. I had brought in two buckets from the cistern, and had set one on the side table, the other on the floor. Soon I heard a terrible commotion. Margaret was industriously and thoroughly dipping Dumpling

up and down, up and down, in that bucket of cold, fresh water. And you know how cats abhor water in any quantity more than a lapping sufficiency.

I rescued the kitten and scolded and shamed the little baptizer. I reminded her of how cold and pitiful the poor shivering cat was. Margaret seemed really penitent. I then went out to bring in more wood and water and returned to start a fire in the cook-stove to prepare supper.

While the fire was getting well started I sat down beside the stove, took the child on my lap, and started to put on her a dry dress. Before long, I noticed noises from nearby that did not seem to come from the roaring fire. I don't know why I opened the oven door, but when I did, out jumped a distressed Dumpling.

"See, Mother, I fix her so she get warm!" explained Margaret.

After Dumpling, there was a whole string of felines in our household—sometimes about as many as our house would hold. The names I recall were Freckles, Laddie, Niddy, Noddy, Boots, Snooks, Swope, Spot, and Snuffles. There were also a Brindle, Priscilla, and Snowball, and a number that were called just "Kitty."

But one season it looked as though our place would be entirely without cats, and the mice and rats would run rampant. We let it be known among friends, neighbors, and relations that we were in need of a cat or two, or perhaps a kitten, and for weeks we were showered—the sky, the mail, the country

peddler, and even our own barn loft threatened to rain kittens on us.

The first offer was a genuine Persian, one that would be six weeks old in four more weeks, off-spring of “Haile Selassie” and “Catherine the Great,” and related either directly or indirectly to such cattish nobility as “Cleopatra” and “Hezekiah.” There were offers of other cats, more Persians, semi-Persians, pseudo Persians, and near Persians. And there were offers of black cats, albinos, and Maltese, tall cats and short cats, long cats and tawny cats, and plenty of kittens.

Cats could be supplied, their potential donors said, by boxful or bagful.

KITTEN BREECHES

We had to turn down most offers though, for we had decided to consider the first offer. At the end of four weeks we gratefully accepted and received the genuine Persian that was then six weeks old.

She came to us a cuddly ball of softness with large quizzical eyes. We enjoyed the kitten; watched her through the sprawling, bouncing, dancing, prancing, and high-stepping stages. We made for her cotton mice and paper boots.

We watched her hide in tall grass and jump out at nothing at all. We fed her with a medicine-dropper, and went through the ordeal of trying to find a name good enough for such a high-spirited little animal.

Friends helped with name suggestions just as they had with offers of cats.

After juggling names from history, geography, and the classics, Margaret resorted to something simpler. She resorted to her nursery rhymes and came out with the decision that the new kitten regardless of pedigree and ancestral dignity should be called Kitten Breeches. That name did seem to suit the young animal then, but we did not consider the future.

As the kitten grew the name shortened, until within a few months we found ourselves in possession of a full grown and very dignified cat answering to the name of Britches. And imagine having to say later, “Mother Britches”—the embarrassment that cat brought us to!

She was rather retiring with her first batch of kittens. The home she made for them seemed secure enough, certainly it was inaccessible to us—between the living room floor and the cellar or basement ceiling! Except for their serenades we would never have known they were there, and certainly we couldn’t reach them without tearing the floor up or the ceiling down. We couldn’t decide where to begin tearing.

Then all meows ceased together. Living room and basement were quiet except for human noises and the cries of their heartbroken mother. The least we could do, it seemed, was to offer sympathy in the form of milk and extra petting.

Finally she allowed us to assist with the funerals. I was hoeing out a row of touch-me-nots when she brought the first little

corpse and laid it at my feet. I buried it at the end of the row. She took the second to Daddy out in the tomato patch. And Margaret presided at the burial of the third. Every member of the family, including the pup, mourned with Britches over her loss.

BRITCHES AND HER WARDROBE

And then one day, sometime later, Margaret came bouncing into the house with the exciting news: “Mother, it’s no longer just Britches, it’s Britches Plus Four!”

Even Dad the Dignified and Jack the Scoffer condescended to go out to the chimney corner to see the new family. They looked like oversized grubworms squirming over and under Britches-cat, but she purred over them as proudly as though they were a superb variety of dark diamonds.

I say dark, but one was straw-colored. Jack the erstwhile cat-hater immediately adopted that one. There was a certain similarity—the kitten’s fur was only slightly less red than the boy’s hair.

Then came the matter of naming the kittens. For the group as a whole we kept the name Margaret had first given them, Plus Four. As they began to show their individual “Kittenalities” we chose and applied individual names.

Three resembled their tawny mother so much that we decided they should be named for her, or at least have similar names. One, with a rusty tinge, we called Knickerbocker,

Knickers for short; one dark, rich gray and black, we called Trousers. The third, pencil-striped gray and white, we named just plain Pants—though, as the children said, that name could be stretched to Pantaloons for poetic purposes.

For the fourth cat, Jack's red kitten, only one name would do. That cat was named Red Flannels, called simply Red. Red was an outstanding cat, even from his grubworm days in the chimney-corner box-apartment. He seemed the friendliest, the most cuddlesome, and the playfullest. He was the first to open his eyes, both of cornflower blue; the first to drink from a saucer, the first to climb out of the nursery box, and the biggest explorer of them all. Jack always said that Red excelled in every way—he even had the most fleas.

Then came the problem of deciding the future of the kittens. It couldn't be the creek—not after we had loved them for a month! And it mustn't be the roadside. Chloroforming the kittens presented the same problem as bellling the cat—a good idea perhaps, but who would do it? Yet we realized that something must be done with our quadruplets—Knickers, Trousers, Pants, and Red Flannel—else cats would be accumulating and cluttering up our place like old clothes. Besides Britches would likely bring in a new “wardrobe” next season.

Pants and Trousers found good homes. Knickers had to be nursed through attacks of fits. Then he disappeared. Only Red Flannels was left, and he turned out to be not a flannel red but

rather a bright orange in color, a beauty—selfish, greedy, but cunning and adorable.

That kitten's first accomplishment was learned at our big old square piano. He learned to follow Margaret's fingers as they rippled through "The Minuet" or "Home on the Range." The cat and girl made an odd duet. Then, as Margaret said, the kitten learned to "solo." By using a pencil or a straw for a baton she could make the little fellow race over the keys, backward, forward, slowly, or "fortissimo." He seemed to know the difference between the black keys and white ones, she said, and would walk or stand only on the white ones, and gently pat down the black ones.

After a few lessons the kitten needed little or no urging to mount the keyboard. Even in the middle of the night sometimes we would be wakened by weird notes, frightening at first, as though from a ghostly hand—then we'd realize it was just that cat again, perhaps searching for the lost chord.

We nursed Mother Britches through flu and pneumonia, or what seemed like such. We left her for dead once or twice, but always she seemed to have just one more life in reserve. I don't know how many of her allotted nine she used during the time she was with us, but one day she disappeared. We never knew where nor why she went.

PEDIGREE OR HANDICAP

After her going, Red Flannels became Cat Supreme of the place and practically cat boss of the entire neighborhood. We

didn't know whether it was his pedigree or his prettiness that wielded the most influence—perhaps it took both. He was a handsome critter, exactly the color and almost the size of a red fox. More than once neighbors mistook him for one as he raced across the field, path, or country road.

One day in his youth I noticed him sitting on his cushioned stool behind the stove. A yardstick was nearby, so I picked it up and measured him. He was fifteen inches high and ten inches across his heavily furred back. And sitting there on that stool he looked simply too regal for ratting.

Perhaps that was his trouble. He was just too magnificent to be a mouser. He sat on that stool looking as wise as though he might have been a cross between a who-who owl and a Solomon-come-to-judgment. Almost too high-hat to purr. Certainly too dignified or too lazy to be bothered with the catching of mice and rats. Or maybe he didn't have barn-cat tastes.

Perhaps his pedigree was his handicap. Maybe that was the subject to which he was giving thought on those occasions when he was so quiet and so dignified—looking so wise in the ways of the world, but not demonstrating enough cat-sense to make a living for himself in the corncrib. A pedigree is a burden that plain alley-cats and barnyard cats don't have to bear.

SILENT SKIES

Nevertheless, we noticed that as Red Flannels flourished, the birds around our place rapidly disappeared. We seldom saw

the flash of red-birds' wings above our backyard. We missed the proud scarlet beauty that used to sit in a shrub near the backdoor and preen himself before the glass in the kitchen window.

He could no longer be seen in the golden bells bush above my woody little rock garden calling, "What's here?" "What's here?"

I used to look up from my digging and tell him that any bonafide bird of the woods ought to know that this new flower was a crocus, a very fine purple one, and that the other flower was a yellow crocus. I'd show him too that the one next to it was a neat little bloodroot plant, and that others were called purple mist, shooting star, and chicken-fighter violet. But the red-bird was a joker. He would continue to sway and chatter, inquiring over and over again.

"What's here? What's here?"

After Red Flannels took up the habit of purring around my feet as I weeded the garden, Sir Cardinal didn't ask about my garden so much. I missed him.

Most of all I missed the wrens. For years Madam Jenny (I believe it was the same one every year) would sit on a trellis in the backyard and call out shrilly, musically, no matter what the weather,

"Oh, this is a beautiful day! This is a beautiful day!"

She seemed as sincere and as enthusiastic as a certain radio announcer who always said, "It's a beautiful day in Chicago."

Then after the cats came, Jenny was seen no more. The cats played in the trellis, but they couldn't sing and they couldn't eat caterpillars so the trellis was soon defoliated.

We noticed too that after the cats came to Knoxdale, Persian though they were, the mockingbird family had deserted us. Years before a pair of them had discovered the honeysuckle vine on our front porch and had rented it for a song. Each summer they would build a house there and rear another family.

Then we would watch the babies grow from egg stage to awkward aerial acrobats, watched Dad and Mother Mocker fly directly over our heads with food when we were sitting on the porch or working among the flowers around the door, watched them cram squirming wiggly worms down first one greedy yellow throat and then another. Indeed we enjoyed our mockingbirds.

They paid their rent-songs in early morning or in dark midnight. They were indeed good neighbors. But after the cats came, the mockers came no more.

Indeed, one grandfatherly old gray-breast would boldly mount the top twig on the hackberry in our front yard occasionally; our mockingbirds always were top-twiggers and front-yarders, they rarely would sit in shrubs and even more rarely would be seen around in the backyard. From his high perch in sun or wind Grandfather Graybreast would throw his scorn at the world in general, the Knox family in particular, and the Knoxes' cats most particularly.

Then with a flash of white he would flit away hoping, evidently, that he had made us feel very badly about being cat-keepers.

The bluebirds, too, gave up their hollow post nest-apartment in the garden fence. Many a time they had pulled out worms from before my hoe, and many a time I counted their eggs day by day and watched their babies grow. But after the cats came we rarely saw a bluebird. We had to depend upon cats for happiness.

Cats, however, wouldn't catch cutworms. And cats wouldn't keep the green worms off our cabbage plants. Nor would they protect the walnut trees and fruit trees and tomato vines.

Well, we considered the cats and we considered the caterpillars. We missed our birds and the cheer they gave. We decided that though we couldn't cuddle them, we could enjoy watching them. We decided that probably the songs that came from high in the hackberry trees were more worthwhile than the purring on the hearth or even the jingling, jangling of a kitten on the piano keys.

And we could get traps for rats and mice.

So with due regret, we allowed His Majesty Red Flannels, the last of his clan, to go to a city apartment where he would be beautiful, would be petted, would get his food from a tin can rather than from the trellis, and probably would be happier and better off all the way around. And for a time, at least, we

kept our farm a no-cat-land and worked to induce the birds to come back.



The Young of the Species

ELEVEN LITTLE MAGELLANS

Here is the saga of “The Eleven Little Magellans,” barnyard gifts to a countrywoman.

They were the softest, downiest gifts you can imagine. They dropped right out of not the blue sky but the hayloft; and they didn’t exactly drop, either; not all of them. But they got down to earth anyhow.

It was this way: one of those bright October afternoons Jack and Dad went back to the barn after midday dinner, and I went along. We noticed something peculiar—springtime noises in October up in one corner of the loft. We went into the stable and found that it was almost raining chickens—wee, soft, little just-hatched chickens. Somewhere over our heads we could hear the crooning of a mother hen.

Jack climbed up, scrambled around among bales and mows until he was in reach of the hen. After becoming a “much henpecked man” as he expressed it, he began to hand them down to me, one at a time. After the chicks came the unhatched eggs, then the old hen herself.



Almost Human In Her Poor Judgment

It was a sort of April thrill in autumn, and I must confess I enjoyed it, but through it all I could see what lay ahead. October is a very poor month for new chicks. The mother hen was dropping her feathers as rapidly as the trees were dropping their leaves, and during the next few weeks I thought I would probably be making eleven pairs of chick-sized outing pajamas.

I guess we excused their enthusiastic ambition to see around the world when we put ourselves in their places, figuratively, and imagined how it must have seemed to get a chick-eye-view of the world. Can you imagine what it must be like to spend three weeks in an egg-shell? And I don't mean a cold storage egg-shell either. Just think what the "Magellans" had to weather while living twenty-one days next to the breast of a chicken running a temperature of 106 in the shade! And besides that the barn had a tin roof! Some shade!

Once out of the shells they began exploring. (To Margaret, their "adopter," they were explorers supreme, hence their

historical name). Among the first of their discoveries were the holes in the barn-loft floor. Through those the Magellans went, “raining” on mules and pigs and calves. Finally Daddy decided the old white hen would never be a fit mother, so he picked up a double handful of chicks and took them to the house and to Margaret. They never saw their natural mother again, nor would they see the barn-loft again until they could rise by their own wing power.

Margaret had never been as much of a livestock lover as were other members of the family, but she could not resist twenty-one little bright eyes (one chick was half-blind), eleven little hungry beaks and eleven balls of fluff. She put them on clean papers in a fruit-jar box, with a crumbled-up muffin and a saucer of milk. Well, surprising to say, and this is always a surprise to me, those wee innocents knew just what to do. Nature is marvelous.

For a week they lived in the box with bread and buttermilk. No more of the world could they see than that; then Margaret upturned the box one day and dumped them right out into grass over-their-heads, grasshoppers hopping all about, caterpillars, ants, and all sorts of stuff like that. And out in that big wide ocean of grass, there they were with not so much as a cluck or a compass to guide them. In the grass they ranged for quite some time, and although they never made the history Magellan did, they did a lot of going around their own world.



Bull Headed

I believe that the orneriest, most provoking, most exasperating job on the farm is that of trying to teach a calf to drink milk from a bucket after he has learned to take the natural way. I learned that the hard way. A Jersey breeder gave Jack a little bull calf a few days old.

Talk about persuading a child to drink a quart of milk a day. Young mothers don't know anything. Try to persuade a calf, a bawling, kicking, and surprisingly strong and hungry calf to drink four quarts a day and skimmed milk at that. And remember that the calf doesn't know how to drink. He's born a sucking animal, that and nothing more. Try that sometime, and you may participate in an unscheduled comedy skit.

For economy sake we decided that the cream would be skimmed off the whole milk and sold, and that the calf would be fed skimmed milk, which after all contains vitamins and minerals and other makings of a calf. It all seemed so easy.

So I started to the barn with a bucket of warmed skimmed milk, saying in what I hoped was a persuasive tone, "Come little calfie, nice little calfie. Stick your nose in and drink your milk. It will make you a big fat vealer by and by."

The calf came, stuck his nose around and about, sniffed, butted, bawled, and bucked. He knew his supper was in the vicinity, but he couldn't get his tongue on it.

I held the bucket under his nose, and quickly half the milk left the bucket. But be assured it didn't go into the calf. It

splattered over me and the landscape. I wiped my milky face and determined to try again.

With one hand I held the bucket; with the other hand I pushed the calf's head into it—or intended to. Suddenly the calf's forehead (hard with latent horns) met my chin with a vim, and the remainder of the milk showered me and the feedlot. I can smile now, but I didn't then. I did not even remember then that I had heard it said that milky showers are conducive to beauty. And what I said was not, "Nice little calfie."

I went back to the house for more milk. By this time an onlooker advised that I put my finger into the calf's mouth and persuade him to suck that, then gently lower (get that "gently") the finger into the milk, so that the calf's subconscious, or something, would tell him he had found his mother. It was as easy as that—to the onlookers.

So again with one hand holding the bucket I put an arm around the bawling calf's neck. But what about that extra finger? I needed a third hand. At last I managed it somehow. I got astraddle the calf's neck holding his head with my knees; that left the one hand to hold the bucket, and one finger free to slip into his mouth.

I was afraid he would chew my finger, but he didn't. He really didn't bite, not hard anyway. That was one fear out of the way. Instead he began to suck that finger just as the advisor had said he would. Ah! The plan worked. To be sure I was standing in a cramped position, but I would soon have that calf taking his

milk. I gently brought the bucket of milk and the sucking tongue together; and I said, not so gently, “Now suck, you sinner.”

I cannot tell you at what second it happened, but happen it did. And it came so suddenly! The calf gave a quick jerk. My finger went in one direction, the bucket in the other. The clatter of the falling bucket frightened the calf so he decided to run. I had no time to untangle my legs from around his neck before he started. This was before the days when women wore slacks or jeans, and a skirt simply complicated the situation.

I yelled something to the effect that he was a “bull headed scoundrel,” and his poor old mother in the stanchion shifted her cud to the other jaw and gently bawled, “So like his father.”

Did I try again? Well, why go further into this? Some words are not intended for print, and those are the only ones that could finish that story. There are some trials of patience that Job didn't have. It is not recorded that he tried to make veal out of skimmed milk from a bucket.



Counting Sheep

Our farming operations seemed incomplete one year, for we had no sheep. On the verge of the Depression, we sold our flock and for various reasons did not restock. The farmer who has slept with both ears listening for that pitiful cry of sheep chased by dogs, and the farmer's wife who has gotten up at all hours

of the night to give an orphan lamb his bottle both might envy us our sheepless freedom, but we missed the baaing, bawling rascals.

No green field can quite be at its prettiest without a flock of ewes and lambs peacefully grazing about. While the farmer of the household probably missed most the check from the lamb sales, the thing I regretted missing was the jovial capering of the spry young fellows. No circus, even a three-ringer, can put on a funnier performance than can three or four lambs on a grassy bank. If lambs can find a place like that on which to play, and if they think that nobody is watching, they can cut more didos than the funniest clown. The child who has not watched a circus of lambkins has been cheated out of superb entertainment.

But a lamb's life is not always fun. I have been strongly reminded of another side.

One springtime Sunday morning we had just finished breakfast and had walked out on the porch to "view around," when we heard a terrific commotion in a neighboring field. Sheep were stampeding, dogs were barking. That meant one thing—dogs raiding the sheep. Daddy grabbed his gun, which was always loaded (and treated as we thought a loaded gun should be), and sped across a field toward the noise.

I ran to the telephone and called the owner of the sheep. He was there in a hurry. One dog was brought down; the others got away, but not before they had left a path of bloody damage.

Among the injured animals was a tiny lamb that had been bitten through the back of the neck. The wool and flesh had been torn off over a space as large as a man's hand, and the tendons in the neck appeared to be severed. The little fellow could not hold up his head nor move it.

The children were young enough to cry over suffering animals, and I didn't act much older. Jack had chased after his Dad and had reached the field shortly after the men and guns had broken up the raid, so this one of the casualties was of his own discovering. He cried when he found it, and cried even more when the men said that the injured lamb must be killed. No need to prolong its suffering, they said.

No lawyer ever pleaded harder for his client than the small boy pleaded for the life of the dog-bitten lamb. The owner rid himself of the problem by giving the lamb to the boy, and Dad helped him bring it home. Right into the kitchen they brought it, and right into my arms they laid it, bleating, and with its head hanging limp.

What could I do? It was hardly a case for woman's traditional remedy, the hairpin. But a needle and thread might help, I thought. With Jack holding the lamb's body and Margaret holding its head in position, I slipped my fingers through the torn and bloody tissues, sought out the ends of those severed tendons, and with a sharp needle and some stout patching thread—the kind I used for knees in overalls—I patched up muscles and flesh in the lamb's neck. How I ever did it, I don't

know now, but when two children and a baby lamb are all crying, a woman can get up a lot of nerve.

In the name of sanitation we poured in a considerable quantity of strong Creolin solution and bound up the patch with clean soft old rags. The children became nurse and doctor. Alex and I were sure the lamb would die. The children were determined it shouldn't. A lot of mulality runs in our family.

It was a long fight, and a hard one. It was early spring when the lamb was hurt; it was late August before the wound was entirely healed. Perhaps you can imagine doctoring a sheep through the hot summer months with a deep open wound and a heavy fleece—but don't try.

We had every complication except gangrene, and perhaps a little of that. But the little fellow was so pitiful we could not neglect him. Dad saw that he had the run of a private pasture, a field next to the house. And as regularly as the hours passed we went out to that field with a bottle of milk in one hand and a bottle of antiseptic solution in the other.

As pitiful as anything else was the fact that in my haste to perform the operation that Sunday morning, and due to the fact that neither Margaret nor I could look at the wound we were treating, Margaret held the lamb's neck crooked and I sewed it in place that way. So as long as we kept the lamb he had a twisted neck. He always looked as though he had a chronic crick.



Icabod

If you have never had a little Icabod on your doorstep, you may not be able to appreciate this Idyll of Icabod, or The Weaning of the One Chick.

Icabod was the frequently-overlooked member of the Old-Hen-With-One-Chick family. He was an important member, however, for without him, Cecilia, his would-be-flapper mother, might never have come to our special attention.

Cecilia was a high-ranking member of the breed which Aunt Ann called “Bleached-out Dominickers,” or “White Barred Rocks.” We named her Cecilia as a pullet, for then she deserved that pretty name. She was really a beauty in her youth; but after a winter of heavy laying, and a spring of “setting” and more or less solicitous motherhood, she looked somewhat frazzled and middle-aged.

The fact that Cecilia was snowy white and that Icabod was inky black should not be considered a reflection on the mother’s morals. A hen can never know what kind of eggs are being put under her at broody time in return for the ones she has contributed to the family egg basket. After all, you know, a hen is a tolerably defenseless being. But this story is not about the hen; it’s about the chick.

We had hoped he’d die a natural death, this singleton chick who was certain to cost more in energy than his worth warranted. But he persistently refused. He was hardy, was

Icabod, you can chalk that up for him, and he apparently had enough stamina for an entire brood.

Icky had pipped his thick brown shell during one of those cool, rainy spells, those miniature January's that a Tennessee April seems to borrow from winter. I believe it was the cold spell we called Locust Winter, or maybe it was Dogwood Winter. At any rate Icky cheeped and squeaked through "Dewberry Winter" and "Blackberry Winter," and came into "Little Turkey Winter"—the one that comes after mid-May—still a-cheeping and a-squeaking.

You see, his mother was a somewhat aspiring creature. She might have had a little leghorn blood in those big veins under her wings. Anyway, she seemed to over-flow with nervous energy. She had little time or inclination to be maternal, and she certainly didn't have the patience to settle down and hover one squawking little Barred Rock rooster.

But again this story is about Icabod. He was always underfoot when we went into the chicken yard. He was always just outside the back door when we threw out dishwater. He and his mother got the first ripe strawberry, and several others. He was present when my lettuce bed was riddled. And I believe he had a part in the upheaval of my fine eggplant seedlings. All spring Icabod seemed to be just one chicken too many.

It came about one day that this flapper mother-hen Cecilia decided to abandon family ties, namely Icabod. It was time for her to drop the hum-drumness of motherhood, preen her

feathers, rouge her comb, and, you might say, “set out” again. And when a setting hen sets out there is not much chance for the chicks unless some more maternal old matron of the chicken yard will take them under her wide and hospitable wings.

And then, too, when Cecilia decided she'd be a mother no longer, it was a marrow-chilling afternoon. Icabod was out late—out in the garden eating worms, like the unloved child in the song. I don't think, however, that he was particularly despondent at the time; he just thought he'd get the jump on the early bird by getting the worm before dark. But all of a sudden a cold shower struck him. With haste he made for his usual warm place under his mother's wing in the northeast corner of the henhouse. But the wing was not there.

Icky craned his long neck, and squeaked and squawked, but Cecilia, high on the roost pole above, had her mind on other matters.

Icky was ingenious, however, give him credit for that. He thought he saw refuge in the lower feathers of a would-be-setting hen I had just thrown off a nest. She had settled down under the roost poles on the straw-covered floor, too lazy, too broody, or too sulky to move or even stand.

Icky, cold and wet as the proverbial drowned rat and just about as bedraggled, thought he'd find warmth in those soft fluffy feathers, so he crept under from behind.

The would-be sitter, shocked and overwhelmed at this sudden introduction to advanced motherhood, gave one

terrific squawk and hit the roost poles. Icky, just as scared and just as shocked, made for the open door and took refuge under a rambler-rose in an iris clump that was just as wet and as cold looking as he.

No human coaxing could bring him out. Just then came rescue in the form and feathers of Abraham. Abraham was one of those rare diadems of the poultry family, a kind and motherly old rooster. Abraham had all the dignity of his breed, plus three years of crowing experience behind him. What can be more dignified than a Plymouth Rock rooster three years old when he chooses to be patriarchal?

Abraham coming into the fray late, especially for the head of a harem, passed the rosebush and the clump of iris and noticed the wet, woe-begone chick, cheeping and shivering. He made a few deep-throated chuckles—or what would you call them? At any rate Icky understood and meekly but still rather timorously, trekked along after the old fellow back to the chicken house.

Abraham took the lowest roost pole and chuckled again to the orphaned Icabod. Finally, by aid of an orange-crate nest box nearby Icky too achieved the lower roost pole. When I left the chicken house for the night, Icky's rain soaked little body was warming itself up next to Abraham's breastbone. I never ceased to marvel at Nature's way of handling things.



Nature vs. Nurture

There was an old hen on the farm that made me feel very inefficient. She was the mother of three little chicks that were hatched about the time another hen came off with a dozen.

The hen with twelve chicks I managed to catch and bring to a good warm box on the back porch. There I could give her babies the best of attention and could make them grow into Thanksgiving broilers, so I thought.

The hen with three chicks was as wild and uncatchable as a deer, so I let her go. She'd soon drag and chill the chicks to death, I thought, but that would be her own bad luck. I hated though to lose those three, for I knew that old hen didn't know a vitamin from a valise.

The twelve chicks on the porch were raised "by the book." I don't say I exactly counted calories or spelled out their vitamins, but they had everything a chick is supposed to need from cod liver oil to buttermilk. The chicks in the barn were dragged about, clucked over, and scratched for.

And in ten days you should have seen the difference. Shadrack, Meshack, and Abednego of Daniel's day didn't have a thing on those three little chicks that the old Dominicker had raised the natural way. They were so much "fairer and fatter in flesh" than the chicks that had been pampered by the book's way. I decided then and there that in the future I was going to let the hens make out the diet-lists for baby chicks on our farm.

Cod liver oil is no substitute for worms or an old hen's clucking and scratching.



Yellow Cows with Blue Blood

Then there was the October day when our old red cow came out of the thicket with a sprawling-legged autumn baby at her heels. And, would you believe it, that babe was already wrapped in his winter red-flannels, snug enough for a November day and December and January days into the bargain.

Who would ever have thought it? I remembered well how sleek the spring calves were in their silky yellow dresses; how trim their necks and ankles looked. They were truly streamlined. But this little winter calf, and one that the old blue cow brought out of the thicket a few days later, were positively wooly. Their ankles looked as though they were wearing leggings and their thick little necks seemed to be wrapped in mufflers. Indeed, Nature is a careful and provident mother.

One year, wanting to improve the breed of our herd, we pooled our resources and stretched our credit enough to purchase two royal dowagers of the registered Jersey kingdom, yellow calves with Blue Blood.

One was U. T. Fauvic's Mona Lady and the other U. T. Landseer's Duchess—but in everyday life they were Lady and Duchess, or collectively, "their majesties." High regard probably

made us take a little better care of them than of other cows in the herd. We had already learned a few things.

For one, if a cow has a pedigree it doesn't keep her from jumping every fence on the place and taking up regular "office hours" in the middle of a flowerbed. And even if a cow has a placid peaceful look, it doesn't keep her from going down the wrong end of the lane, and going so fast that you cannot head her off. She takes her placid looks from her mother and her bullheadedness from her father, presumably.

Lady was well along in, or past, middle age, and Duchess wasn't what she used to be, else we couldn't have bought them. Lady was so plump she no longer cared about her figure and Duchess frankly limped with rheumatism, arthritis, or something. But we bore with their infirmities because all our hopes were pinned on the "blessed events" the two cows were expecting in late May or early June. We were hoping for heifers, of course, and we'd have liked to have twins. But we had to take what came, and be happy if both mothers and babes did well.

I couldn't help noticing the difference in the manners of these two cows of high breeding and good training, and the common-grade cows we had been milking before. Maybe we were a bit partial to the royalists, but somehow they seemed so much more genteel than the cows we bought from a trader. They had more dignity by a long sight, and more self-respect. Our hope was for their offspring to be daughters and granddaughters, and many of them.

Calves at our farm were always big events. If one seemed a bigger event than another, it was not because he weighed more pounds, but because he had more pride of ancestry.

Take, for example, Old Heff's calf. He was the biggest little bullikin that had been born on our place for many a year, but because his mother was only an ordinary cow and his father only an ordinary sire, the poor little fellow was likely to rise no higher in the world than veal stew or at the most bologna.

But Lady's calf—he was an entirely different matter. In size he was really smaller than Heff's son; his markings were no more striking, his eyes were no brighter, his ears no perkier—but in his veins there was the difference—or there was supposed to be.

In those veins ran the blood of animals bearing such aristocratic names as Landseer, Pogis, Fauvic, Mona, and others in the blue ribbon class. And his pedigree was weighted heavily with the recorded pounds of butterfat his dam and granddam had produced. For this reason Lady's little son would probably never go near a soup-pot. He'd spend his days in paddock, show-ring, and wherever else good bulls are supposed to be.

Then there was Duchess. For several days we had been keeping an eye out for birthing signs in old Duchess, but she finally managed to elude us. In the lane from the barn to the woods-lot I could follow her tracks in the mud, but after she reached the leafy carpet on the hill tracks were indiscernible.

Then I had to call Bup who was trailing rabbits and whatnot up and down the lane. Well, I searched and Bup searched—at least he seemed to, but his mind might still have been on the rabbits. It was he though who finally found her, whether by design or accident.

She gave a soft little warning “moo” from somewhere beyond a big cedar. Bup backed off, but I ventured nearer, and there she, stood—the Madonna of the Cedars. You wouldn’t have guessed at first, perhaps, that a baby was near. I had to look hard several times, rub my eyes and look again before I found it, all curled round in a nest of leaves, with two of the biggest eyes and two of the dearest ears. No artists that I’ve ever known have painted such a picture as I saw there—the Madonna of the Cedars with New Baby in the Oak Leaves. That woodsy hilltop held a thrill that couldn’t be put in an art gallery or museum.

That bovine baby gave me a hearty laugh when she got up on those four wobbly legs and tried to follow Mama through the briars and cedar brush to the barn.



Buppo

A PLAIN DOG

And, of course, there were dogs. The best loved of these was Buppo. He was just a plain dog, not far different from other dogs in breeding and background. His mother was an

intelligent little shepherd. His father, or sire, or whatever you call a dog's papa, was a clever fox terrier. But Buppo seemed something better than shepherd or terrier. He seemed "individual." He was so regularly at hand when we needed him, so rarely underfoot when we didn't. He was so patient with human foibles, so understanding of human woes. He was petted or scolded, regarded or ignored, according to the family's whims; but he took it all and remained constant in his adoration, steadfast in his loyalty. In other words, he was just like most ordinary dogs.

Undoubtedly we owed much of what Bup was to Uncle Fayette. Buppo spent a large part of his pup-hood under the guiding hand and understanding tutelage of Uncle Fayette, and as much as a dog can be like a man—and a dog can be like a man, don't mistake that—Bup was like Uncle Fayette.

Many's the hour, at dinnertime, after supper or in cold winter weather, when Uncle Fayette would sit on his favorite stool in the shade, or beside the fireplace in the kitchen, and instruct Bup in his "manners." And Bup, standing there with his nose on the old Negro's knee, learned well to "mind" those manners.

Uncle Fayette loved the dog as much as the dog loved the man, and I heard him say many times, "Buppo is a gentleman, if he do have four legs—plenty of dogs walking around on two." And Buppo was indeed a gentleman in manners, if not in appearance. It would take too long to tell of his gentility, even if I were able.

Bup, like many other dogs, was somewhat “allergic” to storms. The only times we would let him come into the house—in flea season—was during a heavy rainstorm. Well, of course, at that time of the year he would get to be quite a weather prophet. Like Elijah of old, he watched the sky for a cloud as big as a man’s hand, and used that for an excuse to plead admittance.

Once in and dozing in the dark recesses under my desk, it was surprising how deaf that dog could be. I would say to him when the rain was over: “Bup, it’s time to go outside again,” but he would not hear me. Nevertheless, let me rattle a cupboard door or pick up a sack that might contain a tidbit or even mention such words as bread or meat, and Bup was all attention.

A GOOD FARM MANAGER

Would you believe that a dog could be considerate? Buppo could. There was no other expression for it. Who says dogs can’t reason? Only he who did never knew a dog in close acquaintanceship. Bup was thoughtful. Who says a dog can’t think? Bup could remember, even when others of us forgot.

In as far as he was able, Bup would have made a good farm manager. He wanted everything done on time and in order. And times when we seemed to forget, he gently and unobtrusively reminded us.

For one thing, he wanted the mail to be brought to the house on time, and as faithfully as mail time came he would come to the door and softly whine. He seemed finally to learn that the

mail didn't come on Sundays, but holidays were something he didn't understand. There were times when I found it easier to walk down to the mailbox with him on a holiday than try to explain to him or see him disappointed.

And he wanted the cows milked on time. He was always ready to bring them up and to help get them to their places too. And, as well as I did, even better at times I thought, somehow he knew which cows were which. He'd never let a dry cow come to the barn. And he knew enough to keep the bulls and heifers and calves in the pasture, cut them back out of the herd when he drove the milk cows in.

You'll find this hard to believe, if you've never owned a dog like Bup, but out of our milking herd of twenty-odd cows, he knew several by name and would cut them out of the herd, or heel them when called on to do so.

Old Duchess, for instance, was always a slow poke with her rheumatism. She required special attention at almost every herding time. But all I had to do was say to Bup, "Get Duchess." And Duchess was "got." Lady, too, was a big old lumbering bovine, with an udder so big she couldn't hurry along. But Bup seemed to understand, and to let Lady make it along as best she could without too much hurrying.

But that sly Louella—the pest and prankster of the herd—always ready to break and run up the lane, into the cornfield, or in any direction she thought she wasn't supposed to go,

but Buppo knew Louella's way, and kept an alert eye on her movements, always in position to nip at her heels.

Yes, Bup was a worker when working time came. Bup was a protection when he thought protection was needed. No strange man came nearer than the gate when our own menfolk were away from the house.

For the life of me I don't know how Bup knew so well the different traits of various members of the family and how he managed to fit in so well with our many moods.

If Jack pulled on a sweater after supper, or picked up his lantern or gun, Buppo would be all attention, ears up, tail a-wag, standing tensely by the door ready to go polecatting or 'possum hunting.

When I picked up the milk buckets in early morning or late afternoon, he would gallop away to the pasture to round up the cows. He knew well that I didn't care for polecats or 'possums. So Bup never "struck a trail" when he was with me. How did he know?

When Dad and Jack would ramble around the farm in daytime, Bup slept on the hearth or beside the back door. He paid them no attention. But let me or Margaret step out that door and walk so far as beyond the garden, and he'd be at heel—protector plenipotentiary, a true gallant.

DUMB ANIMAL?

Did you ever argue with an animal? Don't try to! Ten to one the animal will win. And if the animal happens to be an ungentlemanly gentleman-cow, or a fractious and irate four-hundred-pound sow, you'll find yourself up a tree or a fence, or wishing you were.

Lesser animals also know how to carry their point in an argument, especially a dog. All his life I argued with Bup about the matter of burying bread. I maintained that it was a waste of good cornmeal or wheat flour to take a corn pone, a hoecake, or a biscuit out and hide it in the asparagus patch. Bup, however, seemed to believe that burying bread was conservation.

He would come into the kitchen, take his bread, and stand beside the door, ears pricked, tail a-wag, bright eyes dancing, until someone would open said door and let him go a-burying. What chance have words against wags?

Then again, I liked to sleep until six o'clock, or later, if convenient or possible. But Bup thought everyone in the house ought to be up by five. He was not noisy about it, not ugly at all, just quiet, haunting, polite but persistent.

Whether the five o'clock morning whistle, the one over at the phosphate mines several miles away, blew, or whether it didn't; whether the clock stopped or struck, he would take his stand beside my pillow, and would seemingly try mental telepathy or something of that kind on me. He would stand there like a conscience, looking at me as though he knew I knew I ought

to be up. If I shut my eyes and tried to ignore him and go back to sleep, he would give a soft little whimper that made me feel more ashamed than if he had howled.

He would stay there, too, until my feet were on the floor. As dumb as an alarm clock, that dog! Even without whining, he would wake us. Dumb animals? If dumb means inarticulate, as the dictionary says, we need to revise our dictionary or get another adjective for our animals.

And you can't teach an old dog new tricks? So what? Whoever started that idea, anyway? Breathes there a dog-owner, young or old, who to himself or anyone else would admit that the old hound, cur, shepherd, or what-not that has tagged at his heel for lo! these many years, needed to learn any more tricks at all?

You know how it is. If your dog is even a little past middle age you know. If that dog has chased your rabbits, sniffed your 'possums, scratched for your rats, shaken your snakes, heeled your cows, barked at your visitors, and begged for your hoecakes over a period of years, you know that if that old dog—Rover, Fido, Bob, or Fiddlesticks—learned any more tricks than he already knows he'd give some human beings an inferiority complex.

Over the years every step I made away from the house or about the farm was guarded by Bup trotting along in front of or beside me, watching for snakes, grasshoppers, or anything else his mistress might need protection from. I remember one day as we started toward the dairy barn he set up a furious barking in the weeds along the path thirty or forty feet ahead of me. I

had rarely seen him so excited. The “booger,” I thought, must be as big as a bear, but I couldn’t see it.

After watching for a while and wondering, I “sicked” him as encouragingly as I could. Bup lunged in and gave the enemy a furious shake, then walked off sheepishly. What he had shaken had been an empty snake-skin that had been left coiled realistically. But it had come off a big snake; I had to admit that.

But then came the sad day when Bup was gone, and as someone said of someone else, nothing in his life became him like his leaving it. He had been ill for a week, eating practically nothing, just lying around in the yard, under the shrubs or beside the porch. He did bark at the telephone men when they came to test out the line one day. And he did try to go to the dairy barn and after the cows for a time or two, but had to be brought back, too weak to stand.

Finally we made him a soft bed, put him in a box, gave him some medicine, and began treating him as we thought a sick dog, a very deserving one, ought to be treated. But Bup seemed to know what was coming. He seemed to want to spare us shock, grief, funeral, and all that. So, sometime during the night he got out of his sick-bed, a super-canine effort it must have been, and wandered away. So, due to that last bit of thoughtfulness we will not say, we cannot say, he is dead. He is just away.

Who says dogs don’t think?



Root from a Honeysuckle Bush

It all began years ago when “Mammy” Stone gave me the honeysuckle bush. “Mammy” Stone was just about the dearest, sweetest little old lady that one finds in a lifetime. She was my closest neighbor—half a mile away—and although she was three times my age we were as chummy as schoolgirl pals.

Later, when the children were small, after a hard morning’s work I could wag one and drag the other over to “Mammy” Stone’s to spend the afternoon. Just to be with her and to hear her tell jolly tales of olden times was refreshing.

She would always give me a bouquet of flowers to take home with me, and one day, it was winter, too, she said, “I am going to give you a bunch of flowers today from my winter-blooming honeysuckle.”

We went out to the garden, and sure enough the bush was covered with tiny yellowish blossoms; the bees were humming busily about them. As she broke off some bloom-laden branches, she said, “You ought to have a bush like this; I am going to root you one.” She bent down a limb, laid a brick over it, and pulled some loose rich dirt over the limb for several inches of its length.

Several months afterward she came over to my house one day, bringing my rooted honeysuckle bush wrapped in a newspaper—and, as usual, a jar of her peach preserves. “I’ve just been thinking,” said “Mammy” Stone, “you’ll have this to remember me by when I am gone. You must put it where it will

grow well and bloom every year and where you will see it often; for every time you see this, you will think of me. Its evergreen leaves and its blossoms will be a better monument for me than a block of cold marble out in some lonesome, overgrown, country graveyard.”

“Mammy” was right. That honeysuckle bush has been a living, daily reminder of her. I enjoy it all the year, and think of the happy times we had together.

I told someone else of my memory flower, and she said, “Now you must have something to remember me by.” She gave me a clump of daffodils, and what gay reminders they are of her. Another friend gave me a dishpan full of violets, and another a mock-orange bush. I was collecting quite a number of “friendship flowers.”

The time came when I must decide where to put them. I read in the papers that flower beds set in the middle of the yard were out of style; I couldn’t figure any particular place for a flower garden; so I finally decided on a border of shrubs and perennial flowers around the yard. At first a five-foot border on one side seemed too much room, but as the flowers grew, and as more were added to the collection, I needed more room. Soon my friendship flower border spread itself out over a ten or twelve-foot width, stretched all around the yard, and even over into the garden. And how we all enjoy it!

There are Mrs. Morgan’s pink roses on the fence; Mr. Walker’s hardy sweet peas growing up among them; Mother

Knox's lilac and bridal wreath side by side, with a flowering almond in front of them. A red rose nearby makes me think every spring of Mrs. Fitzgerald, and "Mammy" Stone's honeysuckle stands close beside it. Mrs. Howell's crêpe myrtle blooms afresh after every summer rain, and the white violets beneath remind me of someone else.

There are golden bells that make me think of a visit to Knoxville when I brought home those bushes as little cuttings in my suitcase. There is a white peony that Mrs. Parks gave me one February just as a little sprig. Neither of us thought it could live, but it did, and has put forth an abundance of bloom every year since.

There is a wall-flower from Mrs. Collier's garden, and a wild snapdragon from Mrs. Lamb's; these iris came from Mrs. Frierson and those from Mrs. McLemore. All that mass of iris around the border—Mr. Ridley called me one morning and asked if I would like some iris. Of course, I would, and he left two bags full at a store in town for me. Now those iris have stretched all around the yard, doubled back, and have gone down the lane to the mail box and back on the other side. If you don't think they are lovely, you should see them in bloom.

Aunt Mollie's buttercups (I know they are jonquils, but I like to call them buttercups) and Mrs. Dodson's short-cup narcissi have done the same thing. They are scattered helter-skelter all among the iris all the way to the road and back. It's no task to go to the mailbox when those flowers are in bloom. There'll be

poppies among them, too, this year when the iris blooms are gone; at least I scattered poppy seeds that Mary Harris gave me all among the flags and buttercups; and later there will be hollyhocks—they, too, come from “Mammy” Stone’s garden or rather from around her back door.



Old Kate

TRAGEDY

Tragedy stalked in Knoxdale fields last week and did more than stalk—came in and gloomily sat down. To make us feel even worse, she brought with her hundreds of those black pall-bearers of the air, turkey buzzards.

Yes, tragedy came. And Old Kate is gone.

Perhaps I’ve never told you much about Old Kate; perhaps we never appreciated her enough ’til now. Kate was a wiry little bay mule, 28 years old this spring. She’s been in just about every furrow that has been plowed on our farm from the time the farm was bought, when she was five years old, until Oscar came (he’s a tractor).

Kate has made every garden, stirred the soil around every tender young corn plant; given each crop of tobacco its first and last plowing; stepped daintily close, but not too close to the young orchard trees since they were merely switches—you see, we’ve always reserved Kate for the finer pieces of work about

the farm. And we've used her, too, where steady dependable pulling was desired.

Other mules have come and gone. There have been Black, and Tobe, and Brownie; Gray, and Dick, and Will. Last, there have been Red and Jane and Neil; all have served as team-mates, but Kate was the one who set the pace. Kate was the one whose neck stuck out first and farthest when a big load began to move up hill.

Kate was our lead mule. She was an institution on the farm that like the barn, the garden, the pond, the flower beds, and Buppo, we never figured we could do without. But Kate is gone.

And it all came about so suddenly. We had recently acquired Ranger Boy, a blue-blooded, black and white, Spotted Poland China papa hog, and all his harem of spotted sows and his family of darling little spotted pigs. Hogs have been cheap, so we thought it a good time to stock up on a really good strain of good breed, and, like everybody else, get ready for the times when hogs may go up.

So Ranger Boy was one of them, head of the sty, you might say. And he and his brood, or broods, were hunting grubworms down in the lower pasture that afternoon, when Dad turned the team loose to go to the pond for water before supper.

Ranger Boy raised his head—and what a head that is! You can imagine when I tell you that although we call him Boy, he's

about four feet high and seven feet long—or he looks that big when he starts toward you.

SHE WAS JUST SURPRISED

He must have caught a whiff from Europe in that east wind, for like a Stalin or a Hitler, or a cross between the two, he lumbered out at his fastest, and before anyone could realize what had happened he had begun his slaughter of the innocents; he had torn the heart out of poor Old Kate. And she looked surprised—surprised as the Finns must have looked.

I say tore her heart out. Perhaps it wasn't her heart at first, but so many other vital organs that it was evident she must die. Dad called Jack, and together they looked at the Tragedy. Meanwhile Ranger Boy was making war on the other mules, and Nell the mare. Then he started toward the men. Only stout locust poles with seasoned muscles to wield them prevented Tragedy from coming to the house.

They got him in the stable, and wired the door securely, and he'll be there, they say, until he can have his belligerent front teeth removed. And we'll all watch him until he goes to head another herd.

Meanwhile, something had to be done for Kate. And on the farm there is just one remedy for livestock injured as badly as she was. I think they didn't even discuss it. But Jack knew how Daddy felt about Old Kate. He had raised her from a colt. Kate had been here years before Jack came; and when he was just a

toddler he'd go to the barn and poke shucks through the stable door.

But Jack knew how Dad felt, so he came to the house for the rifle. It took five shots before she fell. Kate was a mule of marvelous vitality, native Bedford Countian, by the way. So it took five sharp heart-jerking trigger-pulls to make her easy at last.

The thing Dad asked when Jack came into the house was:

“Did she struggle?”

“No,” Jack answered, “she just looked surprised.”



Miles of Them

Consider the fence rows how they grow. They are plowed not, neither are they trimmed; yet hardly a field on the farm, not even the garden, grows such a number of plants to the square foot, or such a wide variety of plants as do the fence rows.

When they named Texas, “Lone Star State,” Ohio, “Buckeye State,” and Kansas, “Sunflower State,” I don’t see how they missed calling Tennessee, “Fence Row State.” Surely it has more miles of forgotten fence rows than any other state in the Union.

There is something about a fence row—in fact there is a great deal about a fence row. I stood before one of ours once and noted the following flora and fauna:

Persimmon, redbud, dogwood, wild cherry, hackberry, walnut, cedar, buckbushes, blackberry, raspberry, hickory, hedge orange, wild plum, saw briars, golden rod, wild rose, grapevine, iron weed, white top, wild violet, wild strawberries, cross-vine, wild fern, oak, ash, and numerous others—all interwoven and as close together as they could stand and climb. I should say there is something about a fence row!

One can surmise from this list of plants that grow neglected in spots that are not cleared, that Tennessee soil would grow a wealth of vegetation if protected by negligence.

It is probable that man in his ambition to clear land and make crops, sell crops, buy more land to clear, and make more crops to sell, and so on, might entirely eliminate some forms of plant life if it weren't for fence rows. They are Nature's way of preserving our environment.

So fence rows serve as archives, we might say, or preserves, or nurseries, or depositories, or asylums for plants that man may think he doesn't want and will not need. Fence rows, however, protect these plants, save them, and turn them loose again to multiply and replenish the earth at any time man rests on his job of crop-making, or at any time he puts his grubbing hoe, plow, and mower aside.

Fence rows make resting places, nesting places, feeding places, and protection for birds and for other creatures of the wild. Of course, they harbor bean beetles, grasshoppers, other insects, good and bad, and even fungi and diseases. But

perhaps all those things have their places in the general scheme of things and life.

The beauty of sight and sound that comes from fence rows—the blooms. In spring and summer, the color in autumn, the flash of bluebird's and red bird's wings, the song of the thrush—those things in themselves pay good rent for the space that the fence row occupies. And remember that fence rows have their own methods of insect control. The birds take care of a number of most nuisances, both in the row and in the fields adjacent. So I reckon it all balances up.

Another credit that might be chalked up for overgrown fence rows is that they hold up fences. And when a fence is no longer a fence—just a rusty strand or two of wire clinging here and there to a toppling post, the fence row turns the cows. Perhaps, if it is neglected enough it may stop even sheep and hogs. Some of our Tennessee fence rows would almost turn an army. Perhaps that is one reason we let them grow, for another form of protection.

One of the most obvious purposes that some fence rows serve is that of hiding poor crops from the passerby, or a neighbor in an adjoining field. A farmer who wishes may have this very effective resort to fall back on. If his corn is poor or weedy, if his hay is short and straggly, if his wheat has rust or cockle, the neighbors need never know, for such a farmer usually has the tallest and broadest, and thickest and thriftiest fence rows in the entire community.

What's going to be done about fence rows? I'm sure I don't know. It would take an enormous amount of chopping and sawing, pruning and digging, to clean out these rows and make the fences stand on their own and face the world and the cows and sheep and hogs. But perhaps it would be worthwhile. Perhaps we could grow more crops and pasture in the space they occupy. Perhaps, on the other hand, we might lose more than we'd gain. I couldn't say. I refuse to advise.

Perhaps I'm just so broadminded I can see both sides of the fence row, even the widest, tallest, and thickest one. Perhaps I'm just too unambitious. I don't want the grass and crops that would grow where persimmons, dogwoods, berry vines, and sumac grew, and where the red bird and bluebird date, and the thrushes sing.

I'll let nature follow her interesting trend of survival-of-the-fittest.

