JUST A DOG, A FOUR YEAR OLD BOY AND—HEAVEN!

SOME RECOLLECTIONS OF BACKWOODS LIFE IN MISSOURI BY A LAD WHO HASN'T FORGOTTEN.

"You can only imagine faintly the thrill of happiness that passed through me as I started for home."

BY B. A. CHILDERS

SHOW ME a boy who does not love a dog and I'll show you a boy who has something wrong in his makeup. Every normal lad, from the time he can toddle, just goes naturally to the dogs. Give him a puppy when he is 6 and he is as near heaven as he ever will be, unless he finally happens to get there. Then he will look around for the wraith of Tige, his childhood playmate and companion, who shared all his joys and sympathized with him in all his sorrows. If Tige is not there the place will seem lonesome and one-sided.

The first dog that I remember was Old Ball. His entire body was black as coal tar, while his face and head were pure white. This suggested his name, and the years prefixed the adjective "old." Ball was a fighter from start to finish. Nothing daunted him, not even a timber wolf. As for common curs, they were simply playthings that he took up, shook, and cast aside as unworthy of future notice. With Ball's assistance, I captured my first hare. I had reached the dignified age of 4 years when that notable event occurred. I had been hunting with the boys, had seen them twist a stick into a hare's fur and pull him from the hollow of a tree, and felt sure that I could perform the operation successfully.

With the hunting instinct strong in my soul, I began to tease my mother for permission to go out into the woods and slaughter something. I had not fully decided what I should kill, but I felt confident I could capture a rabbit if nothing else. I thought Ball was equal to anything, even a gray wolf. I knew but little about wolves, only from their howling at night, which I had often heard, and stories told of them, but, with Ball to protect me, I was not afraid of a wolf.

Finally my mother gave me permission to go, but told me I could not catch anything, being too small for a hunter. But I had a child's faith in my own ability, and plunged into the woods full of confidence and hope.

* * *

It may seem strange that a mother would allow a little fellow like I was to go hunting alone, but we lived in the backwoods of Missouri, and children born and reared under those conditions were more self-reliant. They were taught fearlessness from their infancy, and I had no sense of fear. We had never been told stories to make us cowards. No bugbears were ever invoked to frighten us into obedience. Whenever told to do a thing, we did it promptly, otherwise a neat hazel switch made music about our legs, and we danced sadly to its tune. Those were occasions to be avoided, and prompt obedience kept the dancing lessons a long ways apart. I think I recall about six occasions on which I performed to the satisfaction of everybody concerned, although, as well as I can recall those events, I did not enjoy them so you could notice it at all.

Nasby, speaking of his childhood, said: "The days of my boyhood were spent in the pursuit of knowledge and muskrats, more especially the latter." Mine were spent in the pursuit of knowledge and rabbits, and of the latter I secured a good supply.

It was a bright Winter morning in January, 1882, that I started on my first hunting expedition alone. A light snow covered the ground, and this held thousands of rabbit tracks. There may have been only a half-dozen rabbits to make them, but the tracks were there, and they fired my imagination and stimulated my desire to get a rabbit. Mother was from Missouri, and so was I, and both had to be shown.

* * *

About a quarter of a mile from the house Ball started one. After the lapse of 58 years I can still hear my exultant, childish yell as I urged him on after the rabbit.

The chase was a swift one from the first jump, and within one hundred yards Ball put it up a hollow post-oak tree. I danced up to the tree, visions of rabbits filling the air all about me.

Satisfied that we had him treed good and tight, I cut a stout switch with which to twist him out. After carefully splitting the end, so that it would catch in his fur, I inserted the stick and pushed it up the hollow until I felt it touch his soft body, then began to twist.

When the stick refused to turn further I gently began to pull on it. It would not do to hurry or I would pull the skin off and have to twist him over again. All of this I had learned from watching the boys.

Finally he let go, and I drew him down and seized his hind legs and pulled him from the tree, when Ball finished him by biting him through the head.

You can only imagine, faintly, the thrills of happiness that passed through me as I started for home, my mind full of joy and my hands full of rabbit.

When I came in sight of the house I began to yell, "You said I couldn't catch anything! You said I couldn't catch anything!" And I kept up my shouting until I marched into the house and proudly exhibited my prize.

No conquering hero returning from a victorious campaign ever thrilled so happily as I over my first rabbit. It was a feat of which any four-year-old kid might be proud, and I was exultant. I did not want to share much of the glory with Ball, although my success was owing entirely to his efforts.

* * *

During this Winter Ball received the prefix to his name, and was thereafter known as "Old Ball." In his wanderings and night prowling he had the misfortune to get one of his hind feet into a wolf-trap. He was gone two days, and when he reached home the foot was swollen to the size of six ordinary feet. The bones were crushed so badly that the entire foot came off, bone at a time, and we children called him "Old Ball" through sympathy. But he could catch a rabbit when he had only three legs, and that was going some.

Ball was a natural born glutton. On one occasion this proclivity almost led to his death. The Germans brought butter in sacks, which my father, who kept a little store, bought, sack and all.

On one occasion my mother, after she had emptied a sack, hung it on a line and forgot it. There Ball found it that night and proceeded to get busy. Every part of the sack was covered with butter, and the combination looked good to Ball, who promptly proceeded to devour it, butter, sack and all.

For weeks thereafter Ball was troubled with indigestion. He would turn up his nose at the daintiest piece of meat placed before him. For days he refused to eat, but he finally digested the sack, after which he grew fat and sleek, but he would never again look a sack in the face. All we had to do to drive him into the woods was to leave a sack out over night. The next morning Ball would be gone, and he never showed up until the obnoxious article had been removed. This showed that he knew when he had enough sack.

The Winter following the sack feast Ball met a tragic end. It was the end of an iron-weed, and the old dog met it in springing at a stray cat. The point of the weed entered the abdomen, pierced his body and came out near the hip.

By a skillful surgical operation, aided by a pair of pincers, my father removed the weed, but the shock was too much for the old dog, who had tussled, successfully, with wolf-traps and butter sacks, and he died, the victim of circumstances and an iron-weed, superinduced by his left-handed love for a cat.

* * *

The year following Ball's death was a dreary one to me. I had lost my playmate, and a country boy without a ball or a dog, is sure to be lonely. Of course there are other pleasures, but a dog is something absolutely essential to a country boy's happiness. How is he going to chase rabbits, opossums and squirrels without a dog?

One cold morning the following Winter, after I was dressed, my father told me to go into the wood-shed and see what I could find. I knew by the twinkle of his eye that he had a surprise for me, and I hurried out to see what it was.

When I reached the shed I found the most cunning little ball of yellow fur I ever saw, and inside of the ball was a puppy, just suited to a boy of my size.

You may guess at my happiness, but you can't fathom it. It was too deep for me to realize it all at once, but, gradually, I absorbed it without any danger of explosion. Then I knew that my days of loneliness were gone.

If naming the first baby is a serious matter to its loving parents, naming his first puppy is a no less serious matter to a boy. Various named were suggested, considered, and refused. Ball was a natural name for the old dog, but nothing about the little bundle of fur, except its color, suggested a name.

My father suggested that, inasmuch as the color of the puppy resembled a tiger's, we should call him Tiger, and that title was unanimously adopted by me. Of course from Tiger to Tige is only a short step, and henceforth he was known by that name.

* * *

For eight years Tige and I were inseparable companions. He developed into a splendid fighter, and was as swift of foot as Old Ball. In an open race of 100 yards he could easily catch a hare.

The most terrific fight I ever witnessed occurred between Tige and a big coon. I was plowing corn when I heard Tige baying something down on a little branch that ran through the field. I thought it was a hog, so I went down to get it out of the field.

Along the branch a luxurious field of grass, waist-high, grew. The blades were bearded, and it was difficult to walk through, the beards catching in one's clothing and impeding his progress.

Carefully I parted the grass and made my way through it until I caught sight of the dog. Instead of a hog, as I expected, he had the biggest coon I ever saw, up in the corner of the fence. They had evidently been having the time of their lives, two or three rods of grass having been mashed as level as a floor, where the battle had been raging.

Hostilities had ceased on my approach, each combatant, however, keeping a wary eye on the other. It was plain to be seen that neither trusted the other, and my appearance only added to the coon's uneasiness.

As soon as I took in the situation I said, "Sick him, Tige!" And then you should have seen the mix-up. It was Tige and the coon, intermingled with squeals, yelps and barks, until I could not distinguish between the two animals.

Finally they tore loose from each other, and stood regarding each other, panting and angry, with hate in their eyes. I waited until Tige was rested, then set them at it again.

* * *

I do not know how many rounds they fought. I did not keep tab on them, but I know there was no faking. Each animal was in deadly earnest, the coon fighting for his life, Tige for victory.

Whichever animal got a good grip on the other never let go until torn loose. That the battle was a desperate one, was evinced by the fact that both animals were covered with blood.

During one of their deadly grapples, in which the coon had a grip on Tige, the dog, in tearing loose, threw his antagonist clear over his head, and the coon landed, head on, within about four feet of where I was standing. He did not stop when he hit the ground, but came for me as if he had "a feelin'" for me.

I did not hesitate a moment, but sprinted into the tall grass, which caught and held me firmly. Just before the enraged animal caught me, Tige nailed him and jerked him inside the area, where they went at it again.

If that coon had not attacked me wantonly and without provocation, his tenure of life would have been prolonged. But his uncalled-for attack on an innocent bystander stirred my anger, and I went in search of a club.

When I returned, properly armed, Tige had the coon backed up in the fence corner and was regarding him with an eye of suspicion. I could see at a glance that no love was lost between the animals, and, being a little angry myself, I waded in to Mr. Coon in fine style.

The first blow caught him on the side of the head and upset him. I hit him again, then turned him over to Tige, who, finding the animal on its back, gripped its breast and soon squeezed the life out of it.

This was Tige's first coon, and it was the first one I had ever seen, and we were both somewhat elated over our victory.

Tige and I had been lucky over our first finds. We killed the first skunk either of us ever saw. I pulled it from a hollow tree by the tail, and Tige did the finish. I never felt proud of that incident. And to make it worse, they put me in the barn and fed me from the end of a pole during a whole week. Then for a month the children would make remarks about my taste in perfumery, and suggest that some boys did not know enough to bury themselves when they were dead.

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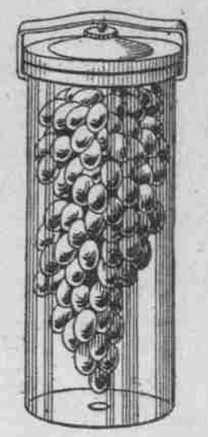

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Obadiah Oldway at Cherry Fair

He Advances the Theory That Spraying Swells the Size of the Fruit.

HOAXVILLE, Or., July 13.—(Mr. Editor)—We just got home from the cherry fair down to Salem last night. We drove down and camped, and it seemed a little like old times before there was so many hotels. Hanner cooked up a good lot of stuff and so our livin' expenses wasn't much, but I had to put the horses in the livery stable o' nights. I hitched 'em to the back wheels durin' the day, but I dasn't leave them that way at night for fear of havin' 'em stole. You never can tell who's who among all them fellers as hangs around fairs of this kind. Though old Selim ain't much of a looker, he's a pretty good horse after all and well worth stealin'. Shakespeare says, "It ain't no use to lock the stable after the horse is stole," so I put the team in the barn and paid the feller to keep an eye on them. I did my own feedin', and the feller knocked off five cents from his bill when I come to settle up. He's pretty clever, that feller is, and I wish you'd make it a point to put your horse up there when you come down to Salem. Men like him needs encouragin'.

They had a king for the cherry fair. He was a big, husky specimen of a man, and him and the queen looked like the picture of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba that used to hang on the wall at Sunday school back in old Missouri when I was a boy. I'll be derned if they didn't! I called Hanner's attention to it, but she said she couldn't see any great resemblance. Beats all how some folks forgets the teachin' of their Sunday school days.

This here king had a big gold key over two feet long. It was the biggest key I ever laid eyes on. They said it was the key to the city, but I didn't see no lock nowheres near big enough to fit it. But of course, I s'pose they wouldn't have that where every Tom, Dick and Harry could have a chance to pick it, and filch the town of the tax money and sich.

Next time there's a parade, them devil wagons—by that I mean them abominable automobiles—ought to be suppressed. It seems like you can't go to no doin's nowadays without seein' them pesky machines trigged out and amakin' a parade of themselves to the discomfort of the crowds of sufferin' humanity that's gathered to see the sights. They ought to be kept off the streets and main roads, parade or no parade.

* * *

The crownin' of the king and his inauguration speech was the occasion of a good deal of hollerin', and you'd a thought the people had clean forgot that this is a republic and that they have a President settin' in the White House at Washington and drawin' his fifty thousand dollars a year out of the tax money. Some people are so frivolous that a little toggery and a blare of trumpets makes 'em forget that all these things cost like the dickens and that when the dance is over they have to pay the fiddler.

Hanner was considerable upset over the women ridin' horseback in the parade. They all rode squaw fashion and wore split skirts instead of the long flutterin', trailin' ones that she used to wear when she was a girl, back in Missouri. This is a new fashion, ain't it? I ain't saw nothin' like that here in Hoaxville. I reckon they don't use a side-saddle when they ride this way, do they? I didn't have a chance to observe all the details for Hanner, she was in a hurry to see the cherries just then and I had to go with her. She was so afraid that she wouldn't see every single cherry that was brought in that she hung around that buildin' the most of the time we was to the fair.

* * *

Well, sir, when I see them cherries I was completely beat. I have raised cherries for a good many years, and I thought I had raised some pretty derned good ones, too, though I ain't, as you might say, been in the cherry business as some is nowadays. I've got a big Royal Anne tree on the south side of the house that's pretty nigh as big around as a man's body, and we get all we want to use from it. Then there's two or three Black Republican trees as are pretty fair bearers down in the old orchard. But if the fruit they had on show at Salem was cherries, I guess I ain't ever raised anything worth mentioning.

Why, I seen Royal Anns and Black Republicans and Bings and Lamberts and goodness knows what other kinds down there as was as big as the nozzle on a beer bottle. I'll leave it to Hanner if it ain't so.

They had 'em packed in boxes like so many dress buttons. The boxes was about a foot square, and I chunted the cherries in one, and I'll swan! it only took nine to fill out a row, and they wasn't the biggest there, either. Did you ever hear tell of the like?

They said that most of the trees that these cherries was took from has been sprayed. There may be something in the spray that puffs and swells up the fruit. I shouldn't wonder if there was, for I never seen no cherries as was left to grow as the Creator intended that was anyways near as large as them. I wanted to feel of some of them and bite into them to see if they was the real thing, but Hanner seen them cards with "Hands off" printed on them, and she wouldn't let me touch one for fear I'd get arrested. That's just the way with a woman, always worryin' about somethin'!

* * *

To prove my theory about sprayin' swellin' up things, I showed Hanner some tubs of dog fennel that was a-settin' around in the room among the cherries. The blooms was enormous, bigger'n a silver dollar, and the stalks was as much as two feet long. Of course Hanner she disputed my word. She said, says she, "Them flowers is Shasta daisies put in for decorations, and no more dog fennel than a turkey is a duck."

I tried to argue with her, but she would have the last word, and people got to standin' around, so I kept still. But you know, and I know that dog fennel grows in orchards as natural as wool on a sheep, and it's likely that some of the spray falls on it and makes it grow bigger'n common. I always did hold out agin sprayin' and this proves that I am right. The pesky weed is bad enough in its natural state.

When I've saw a thing once that does me, so I took in some of the street doin's while Hanner was amoonin' around the cherries and flowers. There was a place where they said they had a "Merry Widder" cottage, and I thought of course it was the home of the woman who invented that monster of a hat that the women wear sometimes, so I paid my 10 cents to get in to see it. I just had a curiosity to see what kind of a shack that crazy woman lived in. When I got in a feller told me to set down on a swing bench that was there, and then he began to swing me. He swung harder and harder and me a hollerin' and yellin' for him to stop. I got so dizzy I couldn't see anything and the walls of that blamed cage turned over and over till I had to think twice before I could make sure I wasn't standin' on my head. When he thought he had me killed he stopped. You ought to have heard the lecture I gave him and his partner when I got out. It was a clean case of swindle. There wasn't no "Merry Widder," nor a house either. Don't tell Hanner that I spent 10 cents to go in there. I'd never hear the last of it if she found it out.

There was other shows there, but they didn't get me inside of none of 'em after that experience. I got to see a good deal of what they had by watchin' out and listenin' when they come out to give a free show on the outside. One feller slid down a wire from the top of the courthouse nearly every day. I liked to watch him, but as bad as I need money I could not be hired to do such a thing. Could you?

* * *

The last night they had what they called a "Martha Grass." That's when everybody turns loose and acts the fool and nobody says nothin' ag'in it. The king turned over his crown and the big key to a feller as he said had just come from the islands of the Pacific. He was a savage lookin' chap with all that paint on, and I was considerable worried about givin' the city up to a stranger like that, and I suggested to Hanner that we'd better hook up and pull out for home. But Hanner, she says, says she, "Obadiah, you're a bigger fool every day. Can't you see that that is Breeze Gibson, as you've knowed from a baby up? He's dressed up for a plug-ugly and him and all them others with false faces is agoin' to lead the 'Martha Grass' doin's to close the fair."

I'll be derned if she wasn't right for once in her life, as I plainly seen when I took a second look. I felt much relieved, for I knew Breeze would hang on to that key till the cows come home, as the poet says, and there wouldn't be no embezzlin' that night.

We started home next mornin' and found the children all right, but the chickens had been scratchin' in the garden. That's the way when you don't 'tend to everything yourself. Yours truly,

OBADIAH EVERAT OLDWAY.

P. S. One of them nursery agents has just been here and Hanner and John ordered $57.98 worth of trees for to raise fancy cherries. It's no use for me to try to lay up anything. O. E. O.

CANNED RELIGION BARRED

Phonographic Sermons Displease Residents and Police of Berlin.

BERLIN, July 17.—(Special.)—The phonograph has entered into social life almost as intimately as the telephone, the bicycle, wireless telegraphy, ice palaces, or any similar invention, but the police here draw a line at its use as mechanical street preacher. A society calling itself the Spandau Reform Preacher Society recently gave proof of its activity by sending out a missionary with a phonograph to hold "divine service" in outlying parts of the city.

The apparatus having been installed at some convenient spot the service began with one or two sacred songs, a sermon or extracts therefrom followed, and more church music wound up the performance. The plan, however, found little favor with the public, and appeals were made to the police to interfere. The appeals were successful, and when the apparatus was made ready for action in one of the suburbs a police lieutenant and his men took it into custody as it was wheezing out the first bars of "Nazareth."

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