

## Fighting a Railroad

By M. QUAD

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When the surveyors for the B. and B. railroad reached within a mile of the town of Scoville they were stopped by the owner of a farm, who threatened them with an action for trespass if they set foot on his land.

It was old Ransome who had lived on that farm since he was born and was now over sixty years old. Boy and man, he had been known as stingy and mean, and no one had ever dealt with him a second time. His wife was about like him in her disagreeable way. The two seldom or never disagreed with each other, but they disagreed with everybody else.

The town of Scoville wanted that railroad and wanted it built at once, but there was old John blocking the way and his old wife backing him up. It must cross his eighty acre farm to reach the town. The surveyors argued and coaxed, but it was of no use.

The railroad finally guarded its surveyors and the line was run, but that was only the beginning of the fight. It collected its forces and began the grading. Old John was out there with his gun and his wife was there with a club, but the lusty men laughed at them and carried them off the scene, and in a few weeks there was the hooting and tooting that the old couple dreaded to hear. They would not sell, and the railroad waited for them to propose some sort of settlement.

There was a highway about a quarter of a mile to the south of the Ransome farm, and the new railroad crossed it at a level. The soft earth was soon gullied out by the wheels of the wagons, and this left the tracks three or four inches above the surface. When old John observed this he yoked up his oxen and hitched them to his wagon and went after a load of wood. When he returned with it to the crossing he stuck there. The oxen could not pull the wagon across the rails. The old man sat down to patiently wait for a train to come along. One appeared in sight in about an hour and found its progress blocked. It took all the train hands and some of the passengers to boot to get that wagon across the track. There was fuming and threatening, but old John was very quiet and calm. He repeated this performance once a day for a week. Then the railroad put down planks and the scheme was defeated.

"Well, we'll have to try some other trick," said the old folks to each other. And as a result of their planning they went out at night with a big pall of soft soap and smeared the rails for a distance of thirty rods. The next train that came that way did not whizz past; it stood still and whizzed, and it took the best part of an hour and a barrel of sand to make the wheels go round again and have a grip on the rails.

Old John was arrested for this soapy trick, but they could prove nothing against him, and he was discharged from custody. After this a new attempt was made to bring about a settlement, but it was doomed to failure from the start. Then came another adventure. Old John cut the grass in his meadow, and while drawing it to the barn to store away he drove across the track at a point on his own farm and a wheel somehow came off the wagon and dumped hay and vehicle in a grand heap. There was just time to get the oxen out of the way when a locomotive of a freight train plunged into the mess. Hay and splinters flew over half the county, and the whole

train was derailed at a cost of many thousand dollars to the company.

There were two lawsuits begun immediately, one by the company to make the old man pay damages and one by Old John to collect the worth of a wagon and a ton of hay. The railroad folks could not show any scheme on his part and was the loser in its suit. A jury also held that an engineer who would slam bang into a load of hay in broad daylight should be held responsible, and Old John got about three times the value of the property destroyed.

By and by when the pumpkin season had come old Mr. Ransome kindly permitted a passenger train to run into a wagonload of them—that is, his oxen stopped to rest when the wagon was halfway over the track. He was heard shouting at them at the top of his voice and seen to flourish his gad in an excited manner, but he was forced to escape to save his own life. Pieces of those pumpkins were picked up miles away, and a week after the wagon was wrecked again, and one of the oxen was converted into fresh beef. Here was groundwork for another lawsuit, and the jury decided that a railroad that would strive to lessen the pumpkin crop ought to pay for it right smartly.

It is very probable that the old couple might have returned to the soft soap trick if they had been given more time, but fate willed it otherwise. They were coming home from a call on a neighboring farm, and it was a gusty, rainy night. As they approached the crossing they saw the light of a locomotive approaching, but defiantly kept on their way and were struck and hurled into a field and both instantly killed. No one in Scoville was mean enough to say they were glad of it, but the B. and B. railroad saw its chance and moved quickly. Before it could be sued by the heirs it went into court against itself and was legally permitted to settle the claim for \$5,000.

They say that the ghosts of old Ransome and his wife haunt the farm.

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