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MOSE HOWARD'S FISH-TRAP

BY J. R. HAMMOND.

NICODEMUS SQUAB, professor of orthography in the Skunkville district school, was a man of an inquiring turn of mind.

Overhearing some of the scholars discussing a prospective coon hunt that was to come off the following Saturday night, the professor drew near and inquired if they would allow him to join them.

"Of course you kin jine us," said Mose Howard, who was the ringleader in all the devilment in the neighborhood. "Glad tu have you go 'long. We'll call for you."

"Thank you," said the professor. "I never was coon hunting in my life, though I've always wanted to go—just to see how it is done, you know."

According to promise, Mose Howard, Dick Miller and Joe Smiley called for the professor, who was ready and waiting, and who joined the hunters, anticipating a jolly time.

After winding up the coon hunt, which resulted in the capture of five 'possums and three coons, Mose Howard proposed that they should go back by the fish-trap and catch a mess of fish.

The proposition was unanimously agreed to, and they struck off down the creek, the professor bringing up the rear, puffing and blowing, though highly elated at the variation that this additional act in the program promised, as well as at the prospect of a successful raid upon the finny tribe.

The queer contraption that Mose dignified with the name of fish-trap, consisted merely of a large sack held open by a hoop, around which the mouth of the sack was fastened, and a couple of ropes, one end of each of which was fastened to each side of the hoop, while the other ends were fastened to trees on the opposite sides of the stream, in such a way as to allow the hoop to remain about half way submerged.

On the bank of the creek was a lantern, in which was about half a tallow candle.

Producing some matches Mose lit the candle and proceeded to explain to the professor the modus operandi of catching fish with his new-fangled trap.

"You just take the lamp and wade into the trap and hold the lamp right in front of the mouth so that the fish can see how to run in, and we boys'll go away down the creek and drive the fish up and into the trap."

The professor, as unsuspecting of any trick as a baby, shucked himself, and then taking up the lantern, waded into the trap that the boys set for him instead of for fish, and in the construction of which they had not only exhausted their financial resources in the purchase of the material out of which it was constructed, but also their ingenuity in the getting up of the same.

"Ugh!" grunted the professor, as he reached the trap and placed the lantern in the position indicated. "This water is cold as ice. I want you boys to make haste."

"Yes, sir," responded the boys. "You'll hear us hollerin' as we come." said Mose, and off they started down the creek at a trot.

"All right," said the professor.

As soon as they got out of sight their gait slackened to a walk, which they kept till they reached a point some 400 yards distant from the trap, when, seating themselves on a log they began the most uproarious din of yelling and howling that had ever awakened the slumbering echoes of those old woods since the aborigines had vacated the premises.

After about an hour spent in this way the boys got up and advanced slowly up the bank of the stream about 100 yards, when they seated themselves on another log, where they continued to whoop and yell like so many wild Indians.

After another hour thus spent they made another advance, which brought the professor and the fish-trap within their range of vision, though, owing to the darkness they were not visible to him.

"Hurry up, boys!" he shouted. "I'm nearly froze, and the candle's nearly out."

"That was what they were waiting for—the candle to burn out—so that their failure to catch fish could be laid to the absence of the light."

"Yes, sir!" they shouted back; "we're hurrying as fast as we can!" And renewing their yells they advanced slowly—very slowly—up the stream.

"Hurry up! hurry up!" again shouted

the professor. "The candle will be out in two minutes."

"Ay, ay, sir!" shouted Mose in reply. "but you must stop hollerin' or you'll skeer the fish."

Sure enough, in about two minutes the candle gave a last convulsive flicker, and in the twinkling of an eye thick darkness reigned as absolutely over the professor and the fish-trap as elsewhere.

"Boys," said Mose, in a tone loud enough for the professor to hear him, "there ain't no use wadin' in this water any longer; let's go back an' git our cloze."

Seating themselves on a log they sat perfectly silent for a while—long enough, as they thought, for it to have taken them to go back to where they commenced their drive, dress themselves and reach that point on their return—when they got up and resumed their progress up stream.

On reaching the trap they found the professor on shore, and though he had completed his toilet, his teeth were chattering louder than a pair of castanets rattling off a quickstep march.

"We'll have to try it over ag'in some other time," said Mose, "and fetch more candle with us. I thought we had plenty this time, but we didn't. I guess I'll bring enough next time."

"Why didn't you fellows hurry up," said the professor. "What made you come so slow?" the chattering of his teeth as he spoke causing him to cut the words into more than the legitimate number of syllables to which they were entitled.

"Couldn't come no faster," said Mose. "The water was so thunderin' cold the fish wouldn't drive fast."

Satisfied with this explanation the professor fell into ranks as the boys filed off in the direction of home. The exercise of walking soon brought a reaction in his system, the first effect of which was to put a stop to the music of the castanets, and on reaching home he pronounced himself all right again.

Some time during the ensuing week Mose Howard informed the professor that they were going to try the fish-trap again the following Saturday night, and asked him if he didn't want to go along.

The professor gave an involuntary shudder as the recollection of that protracted soaking in ice water of the previous Saturday night flashed across his mind.

Discretion prompted him to give a negative response. Curiosity, however, got the better of discretion, and he accepted the invitation.

"I'll be on hand," said he. "There's no fun standing in that cold water, especially when you get no fish, but if you can stand it I guess I can."

At the appointed time the boys came by, when, the professor joining them, they proceeded to the fish-trap.

On arriving there Mose produced a couple of pieces of candle, one of which he proceeded to light and put in the lantern. It was nearly twice as long as the one they had burned out on the previous occasion.

The other piece he placed in the lantern so that it could be easily got at if it should be needed.

This latter piece Mose had manufactured himself especially for the occasion, and had taken some little pains in its construction.

After soaking the wick in water until it was perfectly saturated he had taken a skillet and melted some tallow therein, then placing the wick in a mold, he filled the latter with the melted tallow, and the thing was accomplished.

This particular candle he had carefully marked so as to be able to distinguish it from any other candle.

Before completing their arrangements at the fish-trap preparatory to beginning the drive the professor proposed that one of the boys should take his place at the trap while he accompanied the others and assisted in driving the fish.

"Kin you swim?" asked Mose Howard.

"No," answered the professor.

"Well, you'd run the risk of gittin' drowned, then," said Mose.

"You go on, then," said the professor, "and I'll mind the trap."

So off the boys started, and going down the stream about a mile, seated themselves upon a log, and began yelling and whooping as on the previous occasion.

Hour after hour passed, each hour seeming to the benumbed professor an

age

The yelling seem to approach slowly but surely.

The boys had now arrived at a point where every motion of the professor was distinctly visible.

The piece of candle Mose had lighted and put in the lantern was nearly burned out. Taking up the other piece the professor proceeded to light it. Placing it in the lantern it gave a splutter and went out. Dark! Dark was no name for it. No moon, no stars, no matches.

But that bogus candle would have been a match for a whole box of matches.

"What in thunder's the matter now?" shouted Mose.

"The candle's gone out!" shouted the professor back. "Have you any matches?" he inquired.

"Nary match," said Mose.

"What's to be done?" inquired the professor.

"Nuthin'," said Mose. "The thing's played out. Put on your cloze, while we go and git our'n and then we'll skip for home."

Seating themselves on a log the boys remained quiet for a while, then rising to their feet they came up to where the professor was waiting around trying to get up a circulation.

"Another waterhaul," said Mose.

"Looks a good deal like it," said the professor.

"Don't know why the mischief some of us didn't think tu bring some matches," said Mose.

"I don't know, either," responded the professor in a deprecating tone, as though he entertained the idea that somehow he had been mainly instrumental in producing the bad luck.

"Better luck next time," said Mose, philosophically, as he struck out for home, followed by the others.

They had proceeded about two-thirds of the way home, groping their way as best they could through the thick darkness, when a shrill, prolonged scream directly ahead of them, and apparently at no great distance, broke upon their startled ears.

"Painter!" ejaculated Mose, in a low tone of voice, though sufficiently loud to be distinctly audible to the professor, at the same time springing to one side, and the next moment he was out of the professor's hearing.

The fact was he had only taken a couple of steps and then squatted in the grass, as completely concealed from his companions by the intense darkness as though he had been on the opposite side of the globe.

"Painter!" repeated the other boys, following Mose's example of springing to one side and squatting in the grass.

Left alone the professor, with hair on end, paused a moment to collect his scattered thoughts, but only a moment.

Another scream, long drawn out and apparently but a few yards distant, set his plump body in motion, and the next moment he was streaking it across the country as fast as his duck legs could carry him.

Tumbling over a log lying on the edge of a bank some twenty feet high and nearly perpendicular, down which he rolled, he landed in a mud hole at the bottom.

Gathering himself up he began looking for his ... which had parted company with him on the way down the bank, when another scream breaking upon his ear he struck out once more on his race for life, hatless and covered with mud from his head to his heels.

Coming to a briar patch he was on the point of diverging from his course in order to try and go around it when another scream precipitated the terror-stricken professor into the patch like a catapult.

Emerging from the briar patch with his coat-tails torn into ribbons, the mud-begrimed professor held on the even tenor of his way without any diminution of speed for a hundred yards or so, when his pace began to slacken a little. Another scream, however, put him on his mettle again, but as that was the last, and as he was about exhausted, he soon settled down to a walk, and presently stumbling over a log, he picked himself up and seated himself thereon.

After resting a while, plunged in the meantime in a deep cogitation, he finally concluded to try and seek a shelter for the remainder of the night. So, starting forward, he wandered about, first in one direction and then in another, and it was not until daylight began to streak the eastern horizon that he stumbled on a clearing in the woods, in the midst of which was a log cabin.

Cautiously approaching the cabin, he had reached the foot of a sapling some fifty steps from the door, when a big

dog came dashing around the corner of the house, barking furiously.

No sooner did the professor catch sight of the dog bouncing along in the direction of him and the sapling, than he was seized with such a sudden panic as to cause him to grasp the sapling in his arms and start up it, though, owing to want of practice, with hardly the agility of a squirrel. After a tremendous effort, he succeeded in reaching a fork some ten feet from the ground, where he seated himself, and awaited the issue of events.

He didn't have long to wait. The furious barking of the dog soon aroused the inmates of the cabin.

Scarcely a minute had elapsed after the professor had succeeded, by almost superhuman exertions, in seating himself comfortably in the fork of the sapling, out of reach of the dog, when the door of the cabin opened and a huge six-footer of a backwoodsman, somewhat airily attired, with a long rifle in his hand, emerged therefrom.

"What you got thar, Bull?" said the man, as he approached the sapling, at the root of which the dog was barking vociferously. "What is it, old feller?" he continued. "Bar, painter, ur catamount?"

Bull's response was an abortive attempt to climb the tree, accompanied by a furious outburst of barking.

"Be quiet, old feller," said the man; "we'll soon see what it is," at the same time raising his rifle to his shoulder.

"Hold on there!" shouted the professor, who was beginning to realize the perilous position in which he was placed, and the imminent danger he was in of being shot for a bear or a catamount. "I am no varmint. I'm Nicodemus Squab, professor of orthography in the Skunkville district school."

"Hello!" said the backwoodsman, as he lowered his rifle. "Is that so? Well, that gits me. What in thunder ur you doin' up thar?"

"Wait till I get down and I'll tell you." And crawling out of the crotch in which he had been seated the professor slid down the sapling, when he soon succeeded in explaining matters to the satisfaction of that thinly-clad backwoodsman and his savage bulldog.

It was now broad daylight, and when he reached Skunkville the sun was some distance above the horizon, climbing upward toward the zenith.

Of course, every man, woman and child in the place beheld, with wonder-depicted countenances, the advent of the mud-begrimed, hatless professor, and a thousand conjectures were indulged in as to the cause of his singular appearance.

The professor was disposed to be reticent on the subject, answering interrogatories in relation to the matter evasively, but the joke was too good to be kept, and in less than twenty-four hours his approach toward any crowd was greeted by a broad grin overspreading the countenances of a majority of the members thereof, and his departure signaled by a low guffaw.

This conduct on the part of the citizens annoyed the professor considerably at first; then it grew monotonous and he became disgusted.

Finally he burst into a flame of indignation, and after taking his revenge out of the hides of the pupils, especially Mose Howard and his confederates, the irate professor shook the dust of Skunkville from off his feet and took himself to parts unknown.—New York Weekly.

The Brick Industry.

The largest brick-making region in the country is the Hudson River valley in New York State, where nearly a billion bricks are made annually. Pennsylvania leads in the production of pressed brick. Most of the terra cotta comes from New York, New Jersey and Illinois. Although West Virginia was the cradle of the paving-brick industry, Ohio now leads in the production of vitrified brick. Ohio, Illinois, Indiana and Michigan are the most important producers of drain tile, and Ohio is the main producer also of sewer pipe. Pennsylvania produced over four and a half million dollars' worth of fire brick, about one-half the total production, in both 1900 and 1901. Ohio, New Jersey and Pennsylvania, in the order named, are the greatest producers of pottery, East Liverpool, Ohio and Trenton, N. J., being the chief centres of production.—American Cultivator.

Uncle Eben's Experience.

"It 'pears dat de opportunities of dis life," said Uncle Eben, "is a heap like fish. It's allus de biggest ones dat gits away."—Washington Star.

STRONG FOR THEIR SIZE.

Insects Relatively Are More Powerful Than Men.

Every one in a general way knows of the astonishing muscular power employed by insects and of the real tours de force which they execute either in the pursuit of prey or in defending themselves against their enemies. At the same time one rarely has a precise idea of the strength of these insects because there are few standards of comparison, although nothing is simpler than to make a correct valuation of their strength.

The wing strength of insects is known because of the work of Felix Plateau and De Lucy, who showed that these little creatures could not raise a weight much heavier than themselves, no matter what the surface of their wings. During the course of these experiments a very interesting fact was discovered—namely, that the size of the wing decreases as the weight and size of the animal increases, a fact which explains the slow, heavy flight of the beetle and the swift, light movement of the gnat.

The case is entirely different, however, where the creature moves on a solid surface where its six feet may obtain points of support. In this case we can approximately calculate the force exercised. Take, for example, a fly by the wings, leaving the legs free so that they may seize and raise a match. If a man wished to perform relatively equal labor he would have to raise a beam twenty-four and a half feet long by fourteen and a half inches square. The earwig harnessed to a small chariot drags without difficulty eight matches, which for a large Percheron horse would mean dragging 330 beams as long and thick as himself. The man who leaps the 300 meters of the Eiffel tower is merely repeating the action of the flea, which can leap 200 times its own height. Finally the Hercules is obliged to raise eighty large locomotives to equal the relative strength of an oyster, which in closing its valves exercises a force of fifteen kilograms. Thus it is a much more simple thing to calculate the strength of insects than to equal it, and our modern athletes have yet a long road to travel before they can compete with animals occupying very humble positions in the living world.

Greatest of Savings Banks.

England's remarkable system of postoffice savings banks, started several years ago, have been brought into notice of late on account of the transference of the prodigious clerical force which the system keeps busy from the big building in Queen Victoria street, London, which they have outgrown, to their new home in West Kensington, a vast beehive of a place, covering five acres of ground, close to the amphitheatre called Olympia, sacred to the memory of Buffalo Bill. Barnum's circus and such shows. The moving day concerns 3200 clerks, the thousands of ledgers in which are kept the accounts of the bank's 9,000,000 depositors and the innumerable documents relating thereto.

What has been brought out most significantly in consequence of the attention which the "biggest savings bank in the world" has been receiving of late is the remarkable growth of this unique institution. The number of deposits annually has jumped from 3,000,000 to 15,000,000, the number of depositors from 2,000,000 to 9,000,000. In other words, on every business day of the year 40,000 persons make deposits through 14,000 government sub-stations. No wonder then that since the postal savings banks were established nearly 500 private institutions of the kind have been forced to go out of business.

Submarine Inventions.

A remarkable invention has been adopted by the English Admiralty, the effect of which is to increase the efficiency of British submarines. At present the radius of submarine attack is restricted, owing to the difficulties of ventilation and the carrying of fuel, but experiments warrant the belief that the new submarines will be able to travel immense distances with disastrous effects on the ports of an enemy.

The existing submarine fleet of Britain is not, however, rendered obsolete. On the contrary, it can easily be adapted to utilize the new discovery. The inventor is a British officer well known for his brilliant capabilities. The most remarkable feature in his design is its extreme simplicity. Details of the invention are, of course, withheld by the Admiralty.—New York World.