

Sam Patch's Fatal Whistle

By MAURICE MORRIS.

"NOW, don't misunderstand me," said the man from Longeddy.

"Not with that voice, unless a body's deaf," said old man Ketchum, reaching back under the counter for another walnut and breaking it with his bootheel.

"Don't misunderstand me when I say Sam Patch was a tree-climbin' dog, I don't mean he clumb a tree like a b'ar would. Tree climbin' is a gift, just like—"

"Gab," said old man Ketchum. "Just like political speakin', or, say, hog raisin'," said the man from Longeddy. "Now, for instance, you take a couple o' Poland Chiny gilts from the same litter, and at the end of a couple of years one of 'em, the one that belongs to the man with the gift, will be farrowin' the best and biggest litters in the township, while the other won't even—"

"I kin prove by a dozen witnesses," yelled old man Ketchum, "that the hawg I got from Obed Miles had a vice from the very beginnin', an'—"

"No, it's a gift, as I say," continued the man from Longeddy, "and what Sam Patch was able to do in the tree climbin' line he learned by hard work and trainin'."

"Chazy Smoot, who owned the dog when I used to live up in Ulster county, used to say he never would have discovered his talent if't hadn't been for the shape of a tree in their door yard. An old gnarled tree, it was, a black walnut, which the continuous sound of breakin' shells reminded me in the first place—"

Old Ketchum glared, but I didn't mind that; in fact I was more or less grateful to the man from Longeddy for his remark. It's calculated to get on a man's nerves when he's put a bag where he thinks it's safe, well back under the counter in a dark corner of his store, to have a man come in, and I don't care how good a customer old man Ketchum is, and push through the crowd and put his hand back under the counter and—

"Kind of a stunted tree this one was, with leanin' trunk with knobs of warts stickin' out, and the first crotch only maybe six foot, or to be strickly ackrit—"

"Huh," said old man Ketchum.

Dog Eats Walnuts.

"Six foot six from the ground. This Sam Patch was almighty fond of walnuts. Queer taste, maybe, but he was, and in the fall he'd spend most of his spare time hangin' round under that tree. One day Chazy was coming round the corner of the barn when he see the dog scrabblin' down from the crotch with a walnut in his teeth, which he crunched and et soon as he was on the ground. Chazy didn't think no more about it at the time, so he afterwards told me, but when the same thing happened again he began to take notice, and one day fust thing he knew, he caught Sam Patch scrabblin' up the trunk to git at a walnut that had lodged in the crotch. Held 'on to the knobs on the trunk, he did, and aided by the angle of it, he managed after some slippin' and slidin' to git up and git the nut.

"Well, after that Chaz spent most of his noonings tossin' walnuts into the crotch for the dog to climb for, and Sam Patch got better and better at the game. Chazy used to time him in the beginnin', but Sam Patch got so he beat the watch. Claws got longer and I reckon the muscles in the toes and forelegs got so developed he didn't need the knobs on the trunk to help. Then Chazy began trying him on other trees not so easy, and—well, to make a long story short—"

"Huh?" grunted old man Ketchum.

"By next spring Sam Patch could climb the tallest and straightest tree on the place—if you'd give him time to do it. He had to have a walnut every time before he'd start, though. Seemed to get fonder and fonder of them the more he et of 'em. His teeth got wore down almost to the quick from scrunchin' the shells, all except two front teeth, an upper and a lower, that got kind of pushed out of place when he first began. Reckon they must have come down on a stone or sompthing. Anyway, they was never any good after that. Well, I oughtn't hardly to say that, either. In fact, far from it, because—"

"What breed of dog was he?" said Lufe Upshaw.

"Pug mostly," said the man from Longeddy. "One of them brownish

bunchy dogs with a mashed nose and a pig tail that used to be so common, but you don't hardly ever see nowadays. Sam Patch was pretty big for a pug though, and I always thought he must have had some bull in him, too."

"Guess he did," said old man Ketchum. "Heh, heh, heh!"

"Well, people used to come from all over that end of Ulster county to see

"Whistlin'!" snorted old man Ketchum.

"Whistlin' away like a 10-year-old boy with his hands in his pockets. Only more solemn, though. Seemed to know it was Sunday. Well, I rushed out to the gate, nat'rally—"

"Huh?" said old man Ketchum.

"To see if there wasn't some mistake; but there wasn't. Chazy said he first noticed the trait after a night



"One day Chazy was coming round the corner of the barn when he see the dog scrabblin down from the crotch with a walnut in his teeth."

that dog climb trees, and et got to be a regular nuisance. Finally when the summer boarders began to flock in crowds got so thick Chazy said they interfered with the work to such an extent wa'n't no use trying to keep on, so he closed up the house for the summer and him and his wife and Sam Patch went on a automobile

in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. Got caught in the open, him and his wife, and spent the night at the foot of a cur'us mound that was there. Well, sirs, in the morning, Chazy said, that mound was alive with little fat animiles making a noise like a hundred peanut roasters in the city, and Sam Patch frolicking round in the midst of 'em. Whistlin' marmots, they call them, or some sich name. Anyway, they'd taught that dog to whistle through them two projectin' front teeth of his, and, bein' a persistent critter, he practised so that when he go back home he sounded like the circus steam planner a piece down the road.

"You can get to be too all-fired smart, though, as that dog found out to his sorrow."

"How was that?" said Funk Whalley.

"Well, Chazy Smoot's next neighbor was Ermentrout Finch, that I guess I've mentioned before, and Erm's house was clust to the line fence. This Sam Patch took to whistlin' solos under their winders in the early mornin' (that's when he'd gen'rally do his whistlin') till the Finches couldn't sleep any more.



"Every time he'd draw back to whistle, his lips would stretch so's he couldn't pucker."

trip to the far West. Plenty of money he had, and could well afford it.

"They didn't get back till late summer. Come drivin' along past my place late one Sunday afternoon with this dog I'm tellin' you about sittin' on the back seat whistlin'—"

Didn't do no good to kick. Chazy was too proud of Sam Patch to stop him, and he never ventured over the fence.

"Well, it wasn't ever easy to get ahead of Erm. He thought and thought—and finally some bundles come to him from Washington—the

Agricultural Department, I guess—and he builds him a greenhouse on a small scale. Fust thing we knew, next-spring Erm had a row of dwarf lemon trees in full bloom set out along his' line."

"Lemons git handed out in this State, but none grow on trees," said old man Ketchum.

"Special hardy variety they was," said the man from Longeddy, "and I did hear Burbank was mighty proud of 'em. Erm give 'em southern exposure and built wind breaks of poplars, but I must say the fruit didn't amount to much. All wrinkled up and meechy lookin', it was, but it did the trick. Wish you could of seen that dog in front of 'em. Seemed to sort of fascinate him so he couldn't stay away. Every time he'd draw back to whistle his lips would sort of fold up and stretch back so's he couldn't pucker. Why, after a while it got so they held his teeth from comin' together even—disease they call lockjaw reversus, I think it is. He couldn't do his walm't crackin' stunt, couldn't eat ment even. Finally

Chazy's wife had to take to feedin' him soft stuff with a spoon. Well, Sam Patch kept gettin' weaker and weaker, so's he couldn't get as far as the line fence, and he lay most of the time under the old walnut tree. They found him there dead one mornin'."

"Killed?" asked Lufe Upshaw. "Yup," said the man from Longeddy. "He'd found an old walnut an' contrived to get it in his mouth an' then couldn't manage it. It had choked him to death."

"I wisht," said old man Ketchum, scraping his chair, "I wisht there was sompthing that would choke a body that had vice very lockjaw."



"Finally Chazy's wife had to take to feedin' him soft stuff with a spoon."

Our Only Winged Parasite

THE cowbird is a pariah. He is the only parasite among North American birds.

Cowbirds do not build nests of their own, but lay their eggs in the nests of other birds—mostly of birds smaller than themselves.

Capt. Bendire has compiled a list of ninety-one birds that are made the victims of this imposter of the bird world.

Many of our beautiful and beneficial warblers, like the redstart, the yellow throat and the yellow warbler are frequently made the victims of this bird without a conscience. All our native sparrows, like the chippie, the grasshopper sparrow and the white throat, are imposed upon by the parasite. But even birds fully as large as the cowbird, such as the red winged blackbird and the woodthrush, are not spared.

During the latter part of June and during July any of these birds may be found busily feeding and following a noisy young cowbird, who is incessantly clamoring for food and more food.

What becomes of the young of the deceived foster parents? The answer is that their eggs are either not hatched or the young are starved to death, for nobody has ever seen the foster parents feed any of their own nestlings, while they were anxiously working to fill the capacious maw of the young bandling.

As cowbirds range in summer from northern California and North Carolina well into Canada, the number of useful warblers, native sparrows, thrushes and flycatcher, which these parasites destroy must reach an enormous total. I believe that 2,000,000 is a conservative estimate. Cowbirds do some good by eating injurious insects and weed seeds, but the harm they do is out of proportion to the benefit they render.

The eggs of cowbirds are evenly speckled with brownish, which gives them a somewhat neutral color. They are larger than the eggs of warblers and sparrows, and sometimes more than one are deposited in

the same nest, but I do not know if the victimized parents ever raise more than one bantling.

As a rule I do not like to interfere with bird and beast, but I do destroy every cowbird egg I find.

It is strange that, as far as known, only one bird has grown wise to the trickery practiced by the cowbird. This is the yellow warbler, who frequently builds a second story over the parasitized nest, and thus prevents the cowbird egg from hatching. This fact may explain why the pretty little yellow bird is one of the most numerous of all our warblers.

I have never known the robin to be imposed upon by the cowbird. Cock robin and his mate are excellent parents, and in the defense of their nest they are keenly watchful and aggressively belligerent.

Cowbirds belong the blackbird family, whose other members are all excellent parents.

Otto Widmann of St. Louis has suggested to me that the cowbird's character may have deteriorated in the following manner:

"Long before the country was settled by white people, the cowbirds began to associate with the buffaloes in their spread over the continent, just as now they find their food near domestic cattle. Following the daily wanderings of the buffaloes, the birds could not remain near their nests, and gradually acquired the habit of laying their eggs in such nests as they could find and were allowed to enter."

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Lord Dunsany, in "Don Rodrigo," to be published in the autumn by Putnam's, prefaces his story in a typical Dunsany manner: "I have chosen a pleasant tale for you in a happy land. I have youth to show you, and an ancient sword, birds, flowers and sunlight in a plain unharmed by any dreams of commerce." Dunsany's first work of fiction has the same remoteness of his dramas, but the chronicles are not entirely free from satirical comments on modern times and modern conventional ideas.