

The Poacher's Hut.

By W. R. Gilbert, Calgary.

It had stood for years untenanted. No one knew when or why it was first built; only among the most patriarchal among the "oldest inhabitants" made any pretence to recollect anything about the last occupier. And the sum of their testimony came to this, that he was a sort of converted poacher, who was allowed to live there rent free, and made such a living as he could by rude rushwork, catching fish and snaring wild-fowl. And one day he was found dead, and the local papers were full of the harrowing discovery which they delated on with superabundant details. It was doubtless owing in part to the uncanny termination of the tenancy that from that day the hut had stood desolated.

But apart from this it must be admitted that as a place of residence the Poachers Hut was almost unthinkable and became more so as time went on. Years of vacancy had not contributed to its weather-worthiness: in fact that

itary angler would be aware of a gaunt figure in tattered tweeds watching him with gleaming eyes in a livid face. If unknowing or unmindful the angler spoke to it, the figure would vanish before his eyes and a gust of deadly cold wind—no matter how hot or calm the day—would whirl around him. Another variant had it, that once the time is indeterminate as befits your genuine legend—a casual visitor looked in at the hut, and there in the corner lay the fearsome body just as it was discovered years and years before. The visitor "sickened and shuddered and fled from the door," and full of the horror of his discovery, and convinced that it pointed to a recent tragedy, hurried to the village and told the constable.

After some hesitation, at which he indignantly wondered, the constable and his two stout fellows accompanied him back to the hut. But there was no dead body there—only that cold,



A Popular Manitoba Sport.

it stood at all was a sterling tribute to its original stability. The doors and windows were broken, the roof in more than one place fallen through, the leaning chimney only kept in its place by the straggling branches of a willow that had grown against the wall.

But comfortless as it was as a dwelling the hut was undoubtedly a picturesque feature in the landscape. It occupied a slight eminence—the only spot it was said, which, when the winter floods rose and the snow water rushed down from the high land round about was never submerged. Around it the march stretched for miles. Once when a casual revival of that gruesome story of the last tenant had attracted attention to the marshland hut a certain well known painter had come there, and been revived by the weird splendour of the landscape.

It was of course a fore-gone conclusion that in a comparatively primitive neighborhood legends should grow and multiply around the lonely hut. The original and simplest form these took was naturally associated with the Last Tenant. He had been seen ghostly and spectral, laying ghostly snares or fashioning shadowy baskets. The sol-

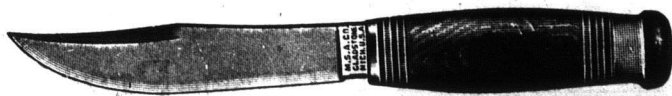
chapel house atmosphere enveloped them; and the blacksmith's dog that had come with his master howled suddenly and slunk away, and was found afterwards hidden in a corner of the forge cowering and shivering. And so the legend grew, and acquired later the picturesque addition of red lights gleaming at times through the broken window, and the dark shadow of "the old man" wandering about at night-fall looking for ghostly birds in spectral snares. The whole story was very properly stigmatized as all rubbish by the "quality" who talked about "ignis fatuus" and mist wreaths and referred with inconsiderable emphasis to the strength and popularity of the liquor sold at the village inn.

But the Poacher's Hut was destined to provide yet another sensation, startling enough, but not at all supernatural. One day the miller's little six year old daughter was missing. She was generally described by the neighbors as "being that venturesome there was no holding of her," and by her mother as "a handful if ever there was one," and in spite, or because of these seemingly contrary attributes, was a universal pet and plaything.

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