

The Sayings and Doings of "Donald Ban."

By Peter McArthur.

The Collie dog began to bark one day just after dinner.

"It will be someone coming," said Donald Ban. John was already at the window peeping out.

"It's Jim McPherson's horse," he said, and then added, after a watchful pause, "and Jim himself is driving it."

"He'll be after the red cow. Hand me the paper till I see the Toronto market." After looking through the market reports hurriedly, he put on his cap and mitts, and with John went out to meet the visitor. As he stepped through the door he remarked:

"They're selling for six dollars a hundred in Toronto, but if I can get five and a half I'll let her go. I was afraid she would stay on our hands till spring."

They met the visitor at the garden gate. They all shook hands, and Donald Ban said, with ready hospitality:

"We will put up your horse, and Janet will give you a bite of dinner."

"I had my dinner before I left home, thank you just the same." McPherson was a raw-boned Scotchman of the kind to whom the country expression, "high in bone and low in tallow," applied exactly. He had a fringe of red whiskers under his chin that extended from ear to ear, and what Bill Nye called "a bright, penetrating nose, that looked like the breast-bone of a sand-hill crane." While he made a pretence of farming, he was really a drover, and his reputation for sharp trading extended over five townships.

"I hear you have a fat cow," he remarked, when the usual compliments and inquiries about the health of all relatives on both sides had been exhausted.

"Well, she's not what you'd call fat," said Donald Ban, "but she's in good order."

"I suppose we might have a look at her?"

"Well, yes. John, you might turn her out in the barnyard."

Presently the red cow popped out of the stable door and began to chew at a cornstalk. John came out to follow the progress of the trading, without taking part. McPherson walked around the cow slowly, then felt various parts of her anatomy.

"Humph!" he muttered. "She is not as fat as I would like."

"No," said Donald Ban, "another couple of months of feeding would do her no harm. I was thinking of feeding her till Easter. She takes on flesh easily, too. Everything you feed to her seems to stick to her ribs."

"It doesn't pay to try to put on flesh on an animal in cold weather." McPherson was still examining the cow and poking her with a long, bony finger. "How much will you take for her, Donald?"

"I am not both buying and selling," said Donald Ban, falling back on one of the stock phrases of country trading. "How much will you give?"

"I wouldn't want her at all, only I am trying to fill a car, and I am short."

"That's strange. I don't think you ever came here to buy an animal, except when you wanted to fill a car."

"I know better than to do it. I never have a deal with you without you skin me out of my eye-teeth."

"Then, you are a foolish man to deal with me. If you want to buy her, make a price. If you don't, say so, and John will put her back in her stall."

"Well, as I said, I am trying to fill a car today. I tell you what I'll do," he went on, hurriedly, with the air of a man who is making a desperate offer in order to relieve his necessities. "I'll give you five cents a pound for her if you deliver her at the station to-morrow forenoon."

"John, I guess you might as well put her back in the stall. I don't think James wants to do any buying to-day."

But John had seen too many battles of this sort to take any action. He waited for further developments.

"Five is a good price the way cattle are going," McPherson protested. "Carload lots have sold lately in Toronto as low as five and a half, and I think myself that the market is going down. Five cents is a top-notch price the way cattle are selling. I must leave a little margin for my own expenses and the chance of a loss."

"Is it a carload of canners you are buying just now?" Donald Ban asked, sarcastically.

"No, it is fat cattle I am shipping, though this one would look like a canner alongside most of those I have. Come, now, what do you say to five?"

"I only say that you should have been a drover in the Highlands of Scotland in the old days."

"Why, what did they do?"

"They just drove off their neighbor's cattle without paying for them at all."

"Well, I have named my best price, and I wouldn't offer that if I wasn't short on filling my car, but I am curious to know what you are holding her at."

"I am holding her at six cents a pound."

"Tut, Donald Ban. I see you will have your joke, though you are getting to be too old a man for such foolishness. Come now, put a sensible price on her, and let me think about it."

"You have my price."

"But that's nonsense. Six cents is the best that the choicest animals are bringing in Toronto."

"But you want to fill a car, you know, and from the way you started in with me, you must have got most of your load under five cents. For very conscience sake you should have one beast in the lot that you paid a decent price for."

McPherson was still digging at the patient cow with an exploring forefinger. Finally he exclaimed:

"If I give you five and a half for her, will you hand me back a dollar when I pay you?"

"I will not. Of all the foolishness I ever heard, that is the worst. Why should I hand you back a dollar, and try to fool myself into believing that I got a bigger price. When I sell, I want to know what I am getting, without wearing down a lead pencil after the sale is over trying to figure out just how much I got. I was never good at fractions, anyway."

After another pause, in which the cow's tough hide suffered a few more pokes, Donald Ban exclaimed impulsively, in the way of a man making his very last offer:

"I'll tell you what I'll do, Jim McPherson! Since you seem to want the cow so bad, I'll let you have her for five seventy-five."

McPherson shook his head vigorously.

"I couldn't think of it. But I'll tell you what I will do. Since I need one more to fill my car, I'll pay you five and a half, without asking for the dollar back, though I'll lose money on her at that."

"John, you may as well put in the cow, and we'll be going back to the woods to saw up that maple we cut down last week. McPherson's time may not be of any use to him, but we have to keep up with our work."

Donald Ban walked to the granary with his most decided air and took out the cross-cut saw. He was going to let McPherson have the cow at the price he had offered, but from sheer habit he kept off giving in as long as he could. John tried to drive the cow back into the stable, but she did not want to go. She ran across the yard, with the young man after her, and McPherson made no move to help. Instead, just as Donald Ban was coming out of the granary he made the fatal move of putting his hand into the trousers pocket in which he carried his purse, as if he were going to take out the needful dollar to bind the bargain. Donald Ban noticed the move, and the battle was on again instantly.

"Never mind her, John, he called. "She will be all right around the stack till we come home from the woods. A run in the fresh air will do her good, and will give her an appetite."

As he was saying this, he stalked past McPherson to the gate that led to the woods.

"You are a hard man to deal with," whimpered the drover.

"Indeed, I am not. I put my price on what I have to sell, and you can take it or leave it. We could do business in a minute any time if you wouldn't haggle so much. You remind me of Jack Hyse. He once spent two days in the spring, when his time was worth two dollars a day, hunting for a Leghorn rooster that he could buy for fifty cents, though the country was full of good roosters that he could get for a dollar apiece. If you lose money in your trading, it is because of the time you waste. But we can't be wasting any more time to-day. Come on, John, we must be getting at our sawing."

John was surprised, for he knew his father was willing to sell for five and a half, but he was too well trained to spoil a bargain by failing to play his part. He immediately passed through the gate and joined his father. Poor McPherson, with defeat showing on every hard line of his face, finally called after him:

"Well, I have to have that cow to fill my car. I'll give you the five seventy-five, but I'll lose money on her."

Donald Ban did not wait for him to change his mind, but walked right back and got the dollar. Then they shook hands and McPherson hurried away to a new battle of wits with someone else from whom he would buy the last cow that he needed to make up his carload. But as he drove down the lane, he waved back in a quavering voice:

"I'll lose money on that cow."

In reply, Donald Ban chuckled softly to himself, and waved his hand in farewell.

"What made you hang on for the extra quarter, when you told me you would let her go at five fifty?"

"When I was at the granary, I saw him put his hand into his pocket to get the dollar to bind the bargain at five seventy-five."

"Oh!"

"I did not say anything that was not true to him in making him give the higher price."

"No-o! Not exactly."

"Oh, well, there are those who say that the reason we have ten commandments, instead of eleven, is that it was known that in this world we would have to buy and sell with one another, and if "Thou shalt not lie" had been a commandment, we would find it hard."

Having said this, they proceeded to cut up the maple log, but every time they dropped a cut and Donald Ban straightened up to take a breath, he chuckled to himself at the pleasant thought that he had once more beaten Jim McPherson in a deal.

The Tale of the Pioneers.

When I hear people complain of hard times, I often wonder why their grandparents, or perhaps remoter ancestors, do not rise in protest, to tell them pretty plainly that they do not know even the A B C of hard work, or hard times.

When I see a thick piece of woods, I wonder how those hardy pioneers ever got up courage to go at cutting out a homestead, and how ever they and their wives endured the loneliness. Most of us do not exhibit much bravery in facing a strange dog, especially at night, but doubtless we would shine brighter if called on to chase wolves from the stock-yard.

I have heard numberless reasons why different men became settlers in our new countries, but I have in mind one family that went in search of a new home as a result of pure nerves. They were comfortably settled in Durham County and doing well at the time of what was called afterwards "the big storm." This storm was something of a cyclone, I think. It levelled everything over a strip of country about three-quarters of a mile wide, carried away numerous articles, and was finally lost in Lake Ontario. Our settler's house was directly in the path of the storm, and was lifted up, even to some of the bed-logs, and dropped in a heap of ruins—the father dumped into the cellar, and the other members of the family flung out, the hired man against a log, and the daughter and son under beams and boards. The mother was flung directly over the well, but, fortunately, the curb had been broken down, perhaps by her weight, and so kept her from falling in.

When the father came to his senses, he got out with great difficulty, and set about hunting up the others, finally getting them all in the scant shelter of a stump. The wind was still so strong that they held fast to any long grass they could grasp, and here they were nearly smothered by rain, or, at least, the downpour, for most estimates agreed that Lake Scugog had been lowered over a foot, and this water was poured down upon the frightened people as out of a huge tub, and nearly smothered them.

You can imagine how little these people had left of all their household stuff. I have heard the daughter, then a child, and now an old lady over seventy, often say that they never saw a shred of all the bedding and clothing and other articles that were in the upstairs part of the house.

After the storm, kind friends drove in as soon as at all possible and carried out all the injured, and set about the task of cleaning up the wreckage. But the place never seemed like home again, and any sign of storm caused a perfect panic of fear, so we cannot be surprised that a move was decided upon. It must have been a trying journey to their future home in Middlesex County, by wagon, over rough mud roads and rougher corduroy, and I don't wonder that homesickness and loneliness caused many tears to be shed. But women of those days were made of good material, and it seems to me that this woman was highly accomplished. She could spin yarn and weave it into blankets and cloth for clothes for all her family; she spun all her own thread from flax, and wove her own linen for bedding and clothing, and what towels, etc., she needed. She braided straw and sewed it into hats, and, of course, could knit and sew. All this, besides the housework and mending and helping burn brush, and taking care of poultry and a garden, a small herb-garden being her special pride. I think you will agree with me that she didn't waste any time in gossip.

In those early days, the cobbler shouldered his kit and spent as many days as were necessary at every house, "shoeing" the family. "What fun for the small fry!"

Travelling was no great pleasure in those far-off days—by ox-sled or on horseback. I fancy that twenty miles or more of it would satisfy most of us. When men took grain to market in London, they drew half a load about half way out, or at least to the best part of the road, left it at a hotel there, and came back for the remainder, and took the whole load on the next day.