

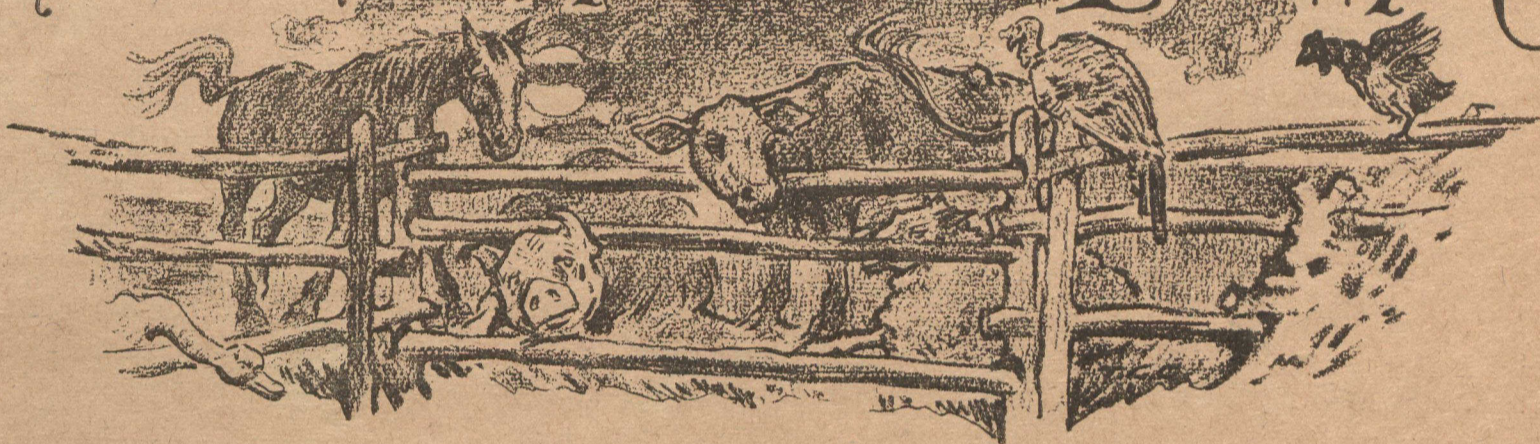
THE COURIER

Vol. XX.

November 25th, 1916

No. 26

The Unconquerable Pumpkin



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PRO-D-I-G-I-O-U-S! Burnished by September suns until it shone like a brass knocker done by an English maid, this prize pumpkin of Jonathan Hynes swelled up inside its golden-red rind until it felt as though it might explode.

Then the corn was husked. The commonplace "punkins" were gaffled together into swaggering, creaking loads out from the corn-fodder shocks to the barnyard. Morning, noon and evening they were slung out and smashed among the swine and the kine and the poultry that picked up the seeds. For three weeks there was a fat feast on that farm. Then the golden swank faded out of the punkin pen. The last of the gourds was gone. Punkin-parings in the kitchen took some of the best. But the prize pumpkin of Jonathan Hynes went to the township fair, blinked in the sun at five hundred farmers, walked away with the first prize and was toted piously home in the family democrat to become for a week longer a vision in the eyes of all. He—it must have been a bull pumpkin—was for the few last days of a late Indian summer in mid-November set upon a dry plank in the midst of the punkin-pen, there to gaffle the last of the mellowing sunbeams before the knife slit his paunch from blossom node clean around to the stalk.

The full intention was to utilize every ounce of this prodigious pumpkin in the kitchen except the stringy parts inside and the burnished, blinking rind. The fat of it was to make several immediate pies. The seeds were to be gathered and kept in a small bag for next year's crop. From this last and best of his species Jonathan Hynes would Burbank his brood until he had a ten-acre field of mammoths in the sweet presently. As for the rind and the bowels of this pride of the west there would be one further episode of flutter and scramble and feast when they were flung to the swine, the kine and the poultry, with the old ram standing near and the old mare gazing at the show.

Certes, as Chaucer might have said in his *Canterbury Tales*, this spectacle of a lone pumpkin airing and sunning himself there in the pen, those Indian summer days caused no end of concern among the animals. It was the dehorned Durham cow who first feasted her eyes, but not her stomach, upon that prodigiosity. Fervently every sundown and as piously every morn she stretched her long, yearning gizzard over the top rail of the fence trying to see herself in the shine of that pumpkin. Her indiscreet attentions attracted the curiosity of the Tamworth sow who, having reared ten piglets to one calf raised by the dehorned Durham, reckoned she had a prior right to the last gorge into the gullet of that gourd. The screams of this Tamworth singing punkinodes drew the cynical regard of the South-

down ram who, being also a ruminant, had a wild desire to sink his battery in the bowels of this butter-making beast that blinked so brazenly in the autumn sun. The ram's billygoat gutturals were a very low-down sort of chant compared to the baritone bawlings of the dehorned Durham and the high C bel cantos of the feminine Tamworth.

Punkinitis of the most violent kind infected even the old mare, who, though she had never tasted that kind of vegetable fruit, began to take a sympathetic interest in the great orange-coloured gourd. As for the hens and the old gander and the gobbler, they also fell into the habit of gathering on and about the fence that shut the barnyard people off from the great pumpkin. Never a hen so much as dared fly into the pen, because that would have been sacrilege when none of the other animals were permitted to enter the enclosure. Once the old gobbler let himself flop into the corral. Immediately there was a simultaneous cry from without.

"Tout ensemble," they shouted. "Keep out of there till we all get a chance."

Many were the dialogues among the animals.

"Be quiet," implored the Durham cow to the sow.

"You should worry. You don't give family milk."

"Bah!" interpolated the ram. "Neither do I. But I can chew as good a cud as you and I'll bet I can butt a hole in that punkin faster than you can."

At which the elderly mare showed her teeth in a sort of grin and said, as she put back her ears to bite the beak of the gander, just because she had no intention of doing any such thing.

"Oh, you're all a pack of loonies. Two weeks ago you were so fed up on punkins you almost had vines growing in your hair. Now you're all crazy about

a single punkin that you wouldn't have looked at twice a month ago. It's either a feast or a famine with the likes of you."

"Go to!" squealed the Tamworth. "You're fed up on oats. You couldn't appreciate a punkin, anyway."

"What a halabalaw!" cried the gobbler. "What right has a swine to eat punkin when it has neither a crop nor a second stomach?"

"Ss!" hissed the gander. "I don't think you ever had the nerve to swallow a punkin-seed. I did once when I wasn't looking and—"

The hens cackled deviously, having each of them nearly choked on punkin-seeds when the punkin-carnival was on. It was a dietetic conference such as never had been known among those barnyarders, just such a discussion as is now going on among wise, economic people as to the need for preventing waste and the ability of the stomach to subsist without luxuries or bulging the garbage cans. Indeed, the philosophy of that barnyard at this time might have been put on record for the benefit of newspaper economists anxious to reduce the cost of living.

To the distended imaginations of the more cloven-hoofed part of the family there was a sort of cornucopia in that pumpkin. They had gazed at it so long that it became a thing of magic; as though any moment its sides might burst and from it emerge whole caravans of pumpkins and other succulent commodities too numerous to mention.

"Oh, great Gourd!" moaned the mooley cow. "How I dote on thee!"

And they all said it was a wise saying.

None the less the farmer paid no heed to his desirous flock. To him it was a joke that one pumpkin should so upset a community of animals. He failed to understand the mystic side of this. The several segments of this gourd, the uncountable number of seeds, its spheroid contour almost exactly like the world itself flattened at the poles, all made it mysterious. It was so by day and more by night. What made the occasion the more significant was that in this last luscious lap of Indian summer came a gorgeous full moon which trundled up from the deeps of the universe as much like a great punkin as a golden-bronze ball could be. And whenever the full moon came fair out into the middle ring of the heavenly circus behold more or less of these superstitious animals of Jonathan Hynes refuse to go to bunk or even the gobbler to roost, while they gazed now at the pumpkin, now at the moon and wondered how heaven had ever made two things so very much alike.

As might be expected, this mystery play came to a climax the night of the full moon.

"The durned gazabos!" ruminated the farmer when he observed that the gobbler and some of the hens

