

A FLIGHT FROM RAZORBACKS

By Mrs. Ella M. Paquin.

My stepfather brought them in, one under each arm. Bending, that they might not receive the least jar, he deposited them on the floor. Seating himself in a nearby chair, he removed his hat, drew from the crown of it a red banana handkerchief and mopped his head and shiny pate. Replacing the handkerchief, he put the hat on the floor by his chair, leaned back, crossed his legs and beamed. Evidently my stepfather's little tin cup of joy was "plumb" full.

The two hound pups, vacuous of expression, wabbling of legs, quivering of tail, "nosed" about my stepfather's feet until the female pup, in a sudden rush of brain power, brought forth a fragment of a bark.

The effort cost her a tumble to her side, but my stepfather was quick to set her on her unsteady legs, soothing her whines by rubbing her long, veiny ears, ending by holding her up by the nape of her neck, to test her "grit."

She howled, which, according to dog lore, was not the right thing. However, my stepfather was nowise cast down. He just shook the delinquent and set her on her legs; then, as he watched her waddle around, he gave us a "talk" on hounds, especially the race from which his pups had sprung.

"As pups they've not got much sense" (that seemed true), "nor will they know anything up to a year old. Then they'll develop head. Now, the mother of these pups— A neighbor turning into the path which led to the house cut short the feats of one hound.

It was our assertive neighbor, a good enough man, but a born "grater," at least to my stepfather.

"Hello, old man, where did you get them things?"

There it was! "Old man" was an appellation like grit to my stepfather's nerves; then to call the very apples of his eye "things!"

"They are full-blood hound!" asserted my stepfather, with much dignity. "None of your worthless cur dog about them."

"A full-blood hound is one or the most ornery, no account dogs on earth. All they are fit for is to eat and yelp. They'll howl to raise the roof if they stub their toe or a flea bites 'em."

And, to my stepfather's unspeakable indignation, the speaker added to his tirade the turning of a pup on its back with the toe of his boot, leaving it there sprawling. My stepfather immediately bent to the rescue, tenderly turning the helpless thing right side up, whereupon our neighbor winked at me knowingly.

Having had his "fling," he did his errand, which was to say that they were going to the bayou that night to "cig" fish, and would my stepfather come along.

As he turned to leave, his own dogs, big brudders, a cross of all dog breeds, I guess, caught his eye.

"Now there are dogs that are dogs! Just enough hound in 'em to give 'em a nose, enough bill to make 'em fight, enough!"

My stepfather stamped across the room to the water bucket, his heavy boots dripping the white of dog from the house. Just then my mother came in to announce dinner, and with another knowing wink our neighbor went his way.

My step-parent sat down to the table with an audible grunt, picked up a fork and empaled a potato. It was plain that his thoughts were of his neighbor.

"He's nothing but a bag of wind! No things like his things! No ways like Southern ways! No dogs like that pair of 'Biddle curs'!"

The pups drew my stepfather's attention. They had scented him out and were tumbling over his feet. Gazing down upon them with the satisfied air of a proprietor he added:

"Now, there are dogs that are dogs, or will be dogs! For pups of their age they can't be beat!"

Whatever the pups were to be, they led my stepfather—in fact, the whole family—a merry dance getting there.

They began at nightfall, whimpering low, then higher, then still higher, until from their walls one would suppose that they were undergoing vivisection in a half dozen different forms. I guess they were pretty hollow, and doubtless they missed cuddling against the warm body of the mother hound.

Raising Them on Milk.

My step-parent was very patient with them—patient for a man. More than once that first night I awoke to see him trotting out to them in his night shirt, a saucer of milk in his hand. Nor did he scold them the following morning. Instead he made excuses for them. He expected to have a "time" until they were weaned.

"Well, if my stepfather thought that the 'time' would end with the weaning he found himself mistaken. Really it had just begun.

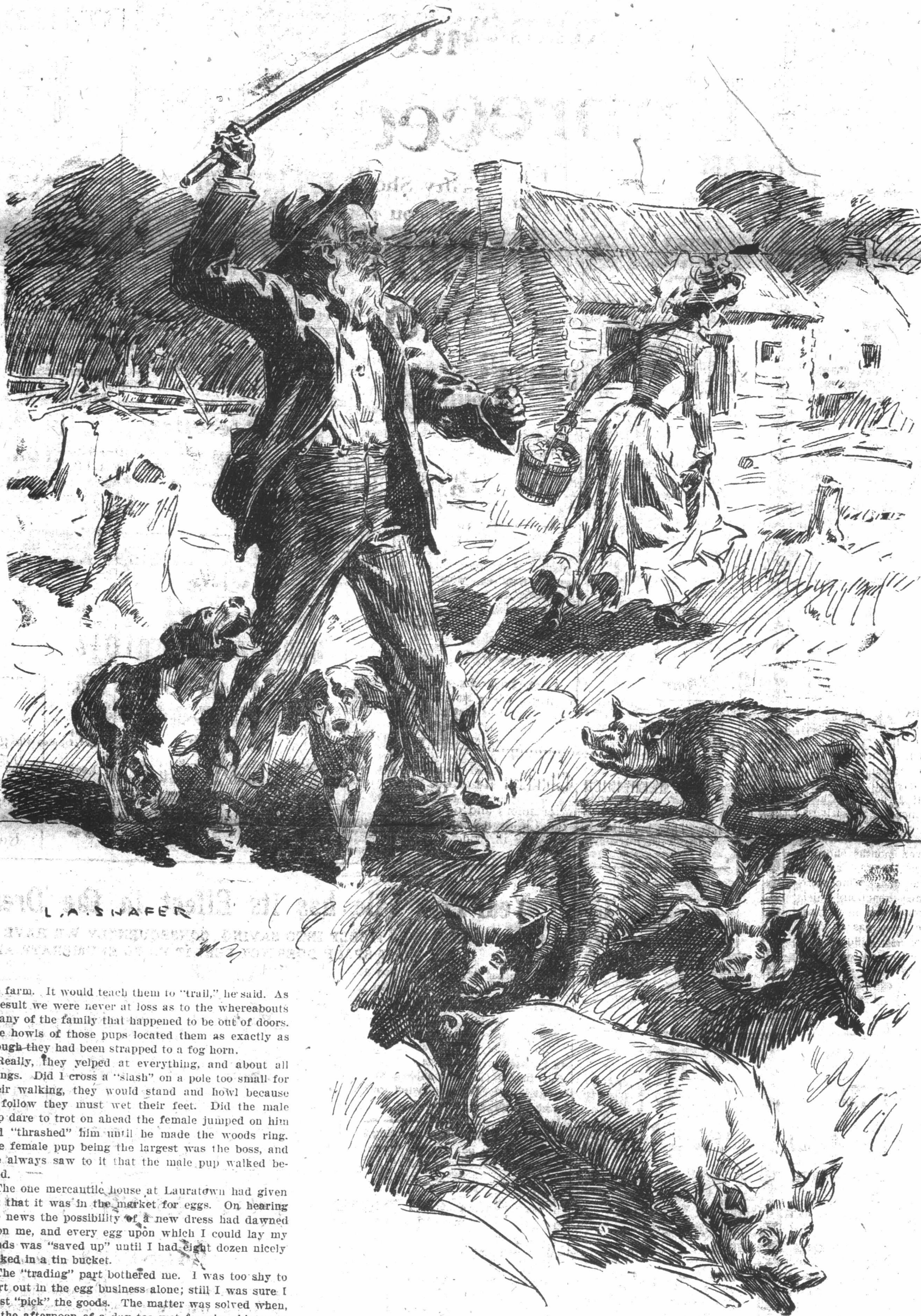
Worms at first, caused by feeding too much cow's milk, the neighbors said. For while the poor pups were mostly ears and stomach. My stepfather dosed them with gunpowder and calomel; then they had fits. Later they caught the mange and went about coated with sulphur and grease. Soon they developed enough "head" to suck eggs, and were tempted with empty shells into which a lot of cayenne pepper had been blown. They got the stuff into their eyes as well as mouth; and for a time they were as blind as moles. However, their hankering for poultry product was quashed. Ever after they gave an egg as much room as men given to the deadly bomb.

At the age of eight months they had come through it all and were long legged, gaunt, innocent looking animals; my pets, you may be sure. When scolded for their mischief they had a way of sitting on their haunches side by side and looking up at us in the most repentant, sname faced manner.

As a final expression of their good intentions they usually laid themselves down, side by side, and, with nose resting on their forepaws, watched us. Let us turn our backs five minutes, and they were digging holes in the garden, or chasing the chickens, or perhaps turning some inoffensive betsy-bug on its back, that they might watch it kick. When there was nothing else on hand they quarrelled with each other "caudally."

About that time they developed the "going" trait. Two hound pups were at our heels the moment we stepped out of the house.

My stepfather didn't object to their following about



the farm. It would teach them to "trail," he said. As a result we were never at loss as to the whereabouts of any of the family that happened to be out of doors. The howls of those pups located them as exactly as though they had been strapped to a fog horn.

Really, they yelped at everything, and about all things. Did I cross a "slash" on a pole too small for their walking, they would stand and howl because to follow they must wet their feet. Did the male pup dare to trot on ahead the female jumped on him and "thrashed" him until he made the woods ring. The female pup being the largest was the boss, and she always saw to it that the male pup walked behind.

The one mercantile house at Lauratown had given out that it was in the market for eggs. On hearing the news the possibility of a new dress had dawned upon me, and every egg upon which I could lay my hands was "saved up" until I had eight dozen nicely packed in a tin bucket.

The "trading" part bothered me. I was too shy to start out in the egg business alone; still I was sure I must "pick" the goods. The matter was solved when, on the afternoon of a day too wet for ploughing, my stepfather said he must go to the town on business.

"Yes, I'll do the selling; you can go along and pick what you want."

He was rather surly about it. He deemed mother and I hard to please in the line of garb, so often we had flouted his roses—he invariably selected roses usually as large as tea cups, yellow or purple preferred. His latest had been a "waist." Over and over my mother had said, "White ground, with small black dots." He had brought home white ground strewn with red roses; the size of a quarter. And he was so elated at his success in choosing small figures that my mother said not one fault finding word—to him. To me she declared her belief that he was as color blind as a bat.

Well, a dress, "saved up" egg by egg, is precious; so, surly or not surly, the choice of my new garb could not be left to a man who was color blind.

Donning his best hat, my stepfather went around to the chimney, where stood his "canes," in reality they were dwarfish poles, about the size and length of a broomstick. They numbered perhaps twenty, all sassafras. It seemed that every fine, straight sassafras bush he came across was cut with his pocket knife and trimmed into a "cane." He cut them long that they might serve as a weapon to kill snakes, and I think that his choice of that particular wood was that, after seasoning, it was light.

Coveted His Canes.

Even yet I remember his "canes" as an unsightly blotch on the side of the old log chimney. How my fingers used to itch to end them as a part of a burning brush heap.

After selecting the strongest of his cane assortment my stepfather was ready to start. So was I, bucket of eggs in hand. The pups were ready, also, bounding around us and barking at every jump.

My stepfather ordered them to their kennel, threat-

ening them with his cane. They must stay at home sometimes, he informed them.

They submitted, lying down side by side, each one resting its nose on its forepaws, its long, soft ears framing eyes that, just then, were very bright and sharp. However, they were meek enough and we thought no more of them.

The road led down to the corner of the field, then turned and ran along one side of it for maybe an eighth of a mile, there, turning again, it plunged into the woods. Sometimes we cut across inside the corner, climbing the fence at the last turn of the road. However, that day it was too wet to do so.

We had walked around in the outside track until we were at the last turn of the road. As we were leaving the field I looked back. Two pair of wishful eyes were peering through a crack of the rail fence. The wet had not prevented the pups from cutting across that corner.

I scolded them, my stepfather turned and shook his cane at them. They appeared all broken up, crushed to the very earth, and we left them there, huddled together.

We travelled on, my stepfather ahead, I close at his heels, carrying my precious eggs gingerly that not one might be cracked.

A "cottontail" went by; after it, like a shot, two hound pups, in full tongue. Those wretched dogs had sneaked behind all the way. At the sight of a rabbit they had thrown all caution to the winds. That, as they sneaked, they had refrained from betraying themselves by a single yelp rather upheld my stepfather's belief in their "head."

They yelped now, as they lost their rabbit to find it and lose it again, running to us between times, a living picture of dog-joy. However, they were very careful not to get within reach of my stepfather's

cane, nor would they allow me to get my hands on them.

Shortly we came to an old "deadening," a wreck of a house standing on a knoll at one end. The place was known as the double cabins, also as a relic of before the war days.

The pups, in circling about the cabins, started a razorback pig. With a "woof" it disappeared, the dogs after it in full tongue. In about two minutes they came back as fast as they went, after them two old razorback sows in milk.

Droves of half wild hogs were common in Arkansas at that time—forty years ago.

The millionaire hunting timber to multiply his dollars, the workman in his wake cutting it for a bare living in a board and, were not the order of things then. Consequently sturdy oaks stood, as they had stood for years, showering their acorns down each autumn. The primitive wild was everywhere, and the wild of the razorback fitted in it well.

Quite often I had come upon droves of these hogs, more or less wild. Usually they disappeared, with their characteristic "woof," and that was the last of them. However, once I had seen them rally at the squeal of a pig. Only a nearby fence over which we had scrambled had saved us—a girl friend and myself—from faring badly.

Well, there was no fence near now, and those old sows were in dead earnest.

To the pups my stepfather's legs were a haven of refuge, and around said legs they fairly twined themselves. The hogs were not particular as to what they attacked—legs or dogs were as one to them. Only by flourishing his cane could my stepfather keep them off.

Had the cane been of hard wood, hickory for instance, it would have served to give "knockout"

blows, but the dry sassafras was brittle, and a broken stick or a half hearted blow would certainly enrage the sows still more.

Could we drive the pups from us they could outrun the hogs, thus drawing them off and ridding us of the fracas. My stepfather tried it. The poor pups clung still closer and yelped. Of course their noise added to the fury of the razorbacks. Indeed, their lunges at us became rather alarming. Moreover, at their snorts of rage the rest of the drove began gathering—other sows, shoats and several young males.

Retreat to the Cabins.

"Run for the cabins, Ella," said my stepfather. I guess that ending his career as hog meat was in his vision just then.

Somehow I couldn't leave him.

"You come, too!" I pleaded. "Let's back away!"

We edged toward the cabins, the point being to keep the pups as still as possible (they were only whimpering now), and not even a cross word did we dare give them lest their little ray of understanding vanish and howls commence.

We were perhaps half the distance when we saw that some of the shoats were closing in behind us. We were in a fair way of being surrounded.

"We'll run for it now! You go first!" directed my stepfather.

I flew, he close behind, the wonder being that the pups didn't trip him, for they still clung to him. To make matters worse, the moment we rushed they howled, a yelp coming at every jump.

Our sudden move dazed the hogs for a second and that saved us. However, by the time we reached the cabins they were right to us. At the door they halted, in fear of a pen. We scaled the log walls—as one climbs a rail fence—to some bare poles which had once held up a loft. I climbed to one pole, my stepfather to another; and, seated thereon, our backs against the wall, we looked down on a mêlée such as only the backwoods can produce.

The cabins were set on blocks and floorless, so our pursuers were soon inside. The pups had entered at our heels, and, with the luck of fools, had managed to squirm under a couple of sills that had once been the foundation of a lean-to. There they stayed and howled defiance until the very eyes of the razorbacks were shot with blood. Out of the sills which shielded their hated adversaries those old sows tore mouthful after mouthful of half rotten wood, their white tusks red from the bleeding of their lacerated gums. As I went up the wall my bonnet had fallen. The young hogs pitched at it, and soon it was in shreds. My bucket of eggs—I had clung to that bucket until forced to climb! It was hard to part with the where-with of that dress, saved egg by egg. Well, the "where-with" didn't go egg by egg. It went in a heap, a half dozen young razorbacks "dancing juber" upon it as they fought that tin bucket with the ferocity of grizzly bears.

Our pursuers soon stopped their noise the hogs would have quieted down, but for the least effect on the crazy hounds. Indeed, the more my stepfather ordered them to "Shut up!" the louder they barked.

It was not pleasant up there astride the beams, nor was it altogether safe. Once I nearly lost my balance. For a moment I guess the hair of my head stood as straight as the bristles of the razorbacks.

At last the pups appeared to have given up the fight—I suppose they really deemed their noise fight. The hogs, having silenced their foe, evidently believed themselves victors; but the old sows stood with their long snouts near the ground, listening wickedly. One by one the young hogs drifted out. Outside they went into a rumpus among themselves, and the sows went out to see about it. Then it seemed that the whole drove had departed.

I made a move to get down. At the stir the pups again set us their yelping. Back came the razorbacks, and the performance, so to speak, commenced once more.

The cloudy weather had darkened. More rain was imminent. And as a hog appreciates shelter in wet times, our besiegers might hang around all night.

The second act had been on perhaps ten minutes, when, peeping through a crack, I spied two horsemen approaching. They were coming straight toward us, attracted by the racket, of course. A second peep showed me that one of the men was our assertive neighbor. Almost any one else would have been preferable just then. But there he was, long, lean, lantern jawed—like a razorback—a true backwoodsman is never fat, only when a baby.

Through the doorless door it was easy for our neighbor to take in the situation at a glance. Grinning prodigiously, he leaned forward on his saddle horn and peered up at my stepfather, sitting astride the beam.

"Hello, old man; what's the matter with your full-blood hounds?"

As I remember, my stepfather did not deign to reply. Stiffly he began unwinding himself for a descent to the earth—a razorback distrusts men on horses, and our lot had bolted as our savior rode up.

Punishing the Pups.

Hardly had my stepfather set his foot on the ground when out-squeamed the pups, bounding about him, with little, glad yelps.

"Now if my dogs had happened to be alone."

The wild howls of a couple of hound pups, belabored with the remains of a sassafras cane in my stepfather's hand, nipped our neighbor's dog's tale in the bud.

"Whip one man over another man's shoulders." Poor pups! However, they had earned a thrashing on their own account, no doubt of that.

The rain was coming down by that time, and with, "I hope you won't be run up any more wild, old man," our neighbors rode off.

The pups had left, too. For once those wretched hounds had evolved enough sense to go home.

My new dress having passed into a dream that was over, I longed for home as well. Besides, I was boneless, and backwoods style absolutely forbade the appearance of a bareheaded female on the streets of a town.

My stepfather was in no mood to transact business, so we both turned back, I carrying my battered tin bucket.

Home, enveloped in a gray drizzle of rain, came in sight. There, side by side, standing on their hind legs, their forepaws resting on the top bar of the fence, were two hound pups ready to welcome us joyfully.