A Page for the MODERN FARMER

- NEWSY NOTES -

By AGRICOLA

PHONETICS, ETC

On January 28th there appeared a letter in the "Public Forum," signed by An Old Teacher, wherein was advocated the spell-and-say method of teaching reading to the primary grades. The alternative system is of course the "phonetic method" which appears to be gaining ground according to Old Teacher's letter. Now this Note is not intended to provoke a wordy newspaper discussion but to present a few facts for readers to think over. My view is that a phonetic system of spelling would save one year out of every seven in school life—but that no phonetic system can be based upon the present alphabet. For example "O-N" spells "on," but what is "T-O-N" phonetically? And just as inconsistent are the words "one," "tone," and "gone," and hundreds of other equally cogent examples.

The only workable phonetic system was introduced by Sir Isaac Pitman, the inventor of Phonography (Phonetic Shorthand.) He followed this up by compiling a very artistic "print" alphabet, with a separate letter for every sound in the language. Once that alphabet was memorized it was not necessary to learn to spell: one heard the sound, and put down the letters that made it! The alphabet was, as a matter of course, much longer than the one in use at present: with about 40 letters, if I remember rightly. Foreigners always have a trouble with our spelling, but if that system had been adopted, they would have been able to read English without any trouble once they learnt the alphabet—even if they didn't understand what they read!

Why, then, was this alphabet not eagerly adopted when its advantages were so manifest? First, because the British people are strongly conservative and dislike change— witness the monetary system, right-hand driving, etc. Second, and more important, still is the fact that every "fount" of type in the Kingdom would have to be discarded and replaced with the new alphabet, all linotype machines and typewriters would have to be remodelled; and all the millions of books already printed would, in the course of a decade, become unreadable to the rising generation.

Two countries have adopted phonetic alphabets: Germany and Turkey. I know little of the former, but it was the late Kemal Ataturk who ordered the Turks to get rid of their old intricate Arabic alphabet, and to adopt a phonetic one constructed by himself. The writer has at hand a copy of Kemal's alphabet, which is a modification of the one with which we are familiar. Some ingenious adaptations are embodied in it. For instance the German phonetic alphabet does away with the letter "C" using K in its place: hence such words as Kamerad for comrade. But Kemal retained the "C" (plain) for the K-sound, and put a little appendage (not as big as a cedilla) below it to show the K-sound. The two sounds of "G" are indicated in the same way. This is perhaps as far as one need go to show the manner in which the Turkish leader met the situation; but his phonetic alphabet has done more for the nation than anything that has been devised for centuries.

Listening to the "Spelling Bees" in town I notice that all the children pronounced the letter H as "haitch:" in the letter of Jany. 28th, it is said to be "aitch." Which is correct? The writer was taught it at school as "aitch," too; and let me say here that Northumberland is one of the English counties that makes no mistakes in its aspirates. Finally I notice the use of "zee" for which we call "Zed," and this, I think, originated in the U. S. A.

MORE ABOUT NUTS

Mr. George H. Corsan, who owns a nut orchard in York County, Ontario, has a letter in The Farmer's Advocate, which is not without interest to readers in this part of the world. With regard to European Filberts and sweet chestnuts, there were hundreds of thousands of trees of both kinds imported from Spain, Sicily, Sardinia, Corsica and Greece, before the war: now not a single nut comes in from Europe. The native sweet chestnuts are to be found on this continent as a blight has attacked the trees.

Mr Corsan's own crops were light in 1940, and he travelled in the Niagara District in search of further supplies, presumably for resale to his customers. He got some but paid these prices: filberts $10 per bushel; English walnuts, (small size) $6; large black walnuts, $4.50; small black walnuts $1; Japanese walnuts, $2.25; Japanese heartnuts, $4. He could secure no butternuts, hickories, nor sweet chestnuts.

"Doctors of bi-chemistry," Mr. Corsan points out, "have discovered that nuts contain vitamin B1, and vitamin E;" and their texture makes them invaluable in providing proper exercise for children's teeth.

I have had some correspondence with Mr. Corsan, who has a considerable reputation as a naturalist, among other things; and he advises planting filberts, and Japanese heartnuts for trial in P. E. I. but does not recommend other kinds. There are sections of the Island where filberts should do well, and it seems that the market for them is very profitable. There is no overproduction as yet!

AS I LOOK BACK

There was a small colony of Italians in Newcastle on Tyne, living in one of the poorer streets, and keeping very much to themselves. On this side of the water the Italians appear to go in for hard work, such as mining, building, and road construction; but they steered clear of such labor in Newcastle. A few held positions as night watchmen where vigilance rather than muscle was requested; one or two ran small restaurants, catering principally to their compatriots; and since I noticed had set himself up near the market place, in a little store which was stocked with Italian produce, such as Chianti wine, olive oil, and the different kinds of maccaroni. Some, perhaps half-a-dozen, had "beats" on which they sold ice-cream in the summer time, and the beat was usually near a gate of one of Newcastle's thirteen public parks; in this way the "ice-cream man" picked up a good many of the children's pennies. His apparatus was a gaudily painted handcart, in which was the ice-cream can set in some refrigerating mixture; the whole being covered in to keep off the sunlight.

But the Italian most in the public eye was the "organ-grinder." It was still possible on occasion to meet the old-fashioned kind of organ-grinder, with his "hurdgurdy" as the instrument was incorrectly termed, and his monkey anchored to him by a long slim chain. His instrument was technically a barrel-organ, operated by turning a crank continuously; the sound was produced by reeds and bellows, and most lububrious it was. The reeds were set in motion by a pegged barrel, rather in the style of what is known as a musical box; and each organ could grind out half a dozen asthmatic tunes.

The de luxe instrument of this class however was the "piano-organ" a very superior modern instrument, in shape resembling a piano on wheels. It also was cranked to produce the tune, but the sound was made by pegs striking metal tongues, so that it was a percusion instrument, not a wind one. The effect was lively and inspiriting and the sound could be heard a block away. Nearly always the minstrel was accompanied by his wife, who collected the pence while he cranked; and sometimes the baby, in a little cradle, was strapped to the back of the instrument; The men were rather picturesque, with moustaches a la brigand, and heavy "gold" ear-rings: not bad-looking fellows and always full of "nods and becks and wreath-ed smiles" for those who gave a coin or two The women may have been as good-looking at one time, but like all Mediterranean races, they did not wear well! The piano-organ was very generally welcomed since it had a good class of lively and harmonious music on its repertoire: and nowhere more than on the poorer streets where the children danced to the music with a grace that was really surprising.

It was often a matter for speculation by the present writer, why there should be evident marks of good feeling between the inhabitants of Newcastle and those "children of the sun," the Italians. The Briton was, in my day, rather inclined to be distant with his own kind, and more so with foreigners. The Italian patriot, Mazzini, had once found refuge in the North about the middle of the nineteenth century, and this may have had something to do with the sympathy for his countrymen; for as Sir Walter Scott points out (in "Rokeby" I believe) we think more of those we have helped that of those who help us! If we are inclined to go furter back, we must admit that the Roman invasion was the first of a chain of circumstances that transformed the British Isles from the haunts of a few squalid tribes to the centre of a mighty Empire.

A SHOCK TO THE PROVINCE

Never did our newspaper better merit its proud title of The Guardian than by the publication of the courageous, dignified, and timely editorial of Feby. 1st, under the above caption. "Every miscarriage of justice, on whatever grounds of false compassion or sentimentality, is an encouragement to further outbreaks of the same kind." It has often been remarked, in statistical documents that homicide cases in Britain are a mere fraction compared with those in the North American continent; and there is never any donbt why that is so. "Crime does not pay" there, because punishment is inevitable and no one is exempt.

An atrocious murder was committed on the Canadian mainland last fall, and a youth was convicted and sentenced to hang. Immediately the sentimentalists got busy, and the sentence was commuted to imprisonment for life. The prisoner smiled when told of it, said the newspaper account. There does not seem to have been any sentiment wasted on the victim in his forgotten grave.

Another queer quirk that I've noticed is a tendency to excuse a criminal on the grounds that "he has been drinking" or that he was drunk: he is supposed to be not responsible for his action! And another bemuddled idea is current in some quarters that unless an accused person is actually seen to commit a crime, he cannot be convicted.

AGRICULTURE IN THE NORTH (1)

The writer who would discuss agriculture of a local type in England, is at once faced with the question "where must I begin?" Now while we have no written records, we have certain indisputable evidence that agriculture in the North had its small beginnings prior to the Roman occupation of what is now Northumberland. That region supported a great population of Celtic origin; every hill is crowned with the circular earthworks that enclosed and defended their "cities," and the sides of the hills, below the earthworks, still show the narrow, shelf-like traces of "terrace cultivation." Caesar found the tribes in the South cultivating grain and we can imagine our Northumbrians had some kind of oats growing in their terraces-where they would be able to keep an eye on the grain. There were wild cattle too, and their descendants survive to this day; but no Roman historian has left any record as to whether our northern aborigines herded them or hunted them.

The long Roman occupation of the North and the comparative security of the Roman province must have produced great changes in the primitive system of agriculture. The Roman Wall alone called for a garrison of 15,000 men and the numerous "camps" in our country would double the number; and we can imagine that the needs of this huge force quartered on and about the Wall would accelerate the production of food for both man and beast. Villas sprang up outside the walls of the "camp" (castra); these were worked by means of Britons who were reduced to servitude. Traces of a "three field system" of rotation are still to be seen. The Roman villa later became the manor of the Anglo-Saxon, and, later still, that of the Norman.

These are many passages in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle which go to show that agriculture had made important progress: loss of cattle in hard winters and by "murrains," is often mentioned, while one reads of "the badness of the weather by which the fruits of the earth were much marred, and the produce of the trees over all this land almost entirely perished." But agriculture was not properly systematized until after the Norman Conquest, when the power of the Church was able to direct it. This must form the subject of a future Note.

A LOUD EXPLOSION

The autumn of 1883 was characterized by the most brightly colored sunsets I have ever witnessed.

(Continued on page 13, Col 7)

Weekly Live Stock Market Report

East and West followed opposite trends in cattle prices this week. Toronto recovered last week's loss of 25 cents, while making a good clearance but western markets were barely steady to 25 cents and 50 cents lower with export demand lacking. Only the moderate offering on hand saved the price structure in the West from sharper declines. Calves closed lower at Montreal and Winnipeg but elsewhere were undisturbed. The only change in the hog market was a shade easier feeling at Montreal toward the close and a gain of 10 cents to 25 cents on Alberta merkets. The lamb market was stronger at Toronto and steady to firm at other centres.

Eastern Cattle Prices Stronger

A gain of 25 cents was recorded in cattle prices at TORONTO with a good cleanup made by the close. Some choice weighty steers sold at $9.75 to $10 and others from $9.50 down, while butchers ranged between $7.25 and $9. With a light offering on hand MONTREAL was steady to a shade firmer, although there was a weaker tendency on cows toward the close. With no top quality on hand, good steers commanded $8.75 to $9.25 and cows ranged from $4 to $6 and an odd $6.25. Receipts in the MARITIMES continued below requirements with a resultant advance of 25 cents in price, good to choice steers making $8.25 to $8.75.

Western Cattle Steady to Lower

Lack of support from export buyers was mainly responsible for ironing out some of the recent price increases in the West. Moderate deliveries, however, served to prevent any very severe declines. WINNIPEG was 25 cents to 50 cents lower on yearlings and most killing steers lacking weight were fully 25 cents down. Most slaughter steers sold from $8.50 downward. Cows and bulls, however, held steady and also replacement cattle. Feeder steers were quoted at $7 to $7.50 with some fleshy kinds around $8. CALGARY was also steady to 25 cents lower and had the best of the butcher steers offering at $8.25 to $8.75 after recording an early top of $9. EDMONTON closed fully steady and unchanged with the high in the steer division at $8.50. Top sales at PRINCE ALBERT, MOOSE JAW, and REGINA reached $8 for steers, SASKATOON $8.25 and VANCOUVER $8.50.

United States Market

The Buffalo market was lower this week, while Toronto advanced and the margin at present is in favour of Toronto. Odd sales of Canadian steers were made at Buffalo at $9.25 and $9.85, off car weights Latest quotations from St. Paul on medium to good Canadian steers were $10 and good cows $7.50.

Export shipments to the United States again dropped sharply only 1,912 beef cattle crossing the line during the week, 177 dairy and 937 calves. Totals to date this year amount to 13,875 beef, 1,223 dairy and 4,163 calves, compared with 7,275 beef, 1,096 dairy and 3,889 calves in the corresponding period of last year.

Calves Steady to Easier

Calves sold readily at $13 to $13.50 for choice at Toronto but Montreal became weaker as the week progressed and closed around $1 lower, at $12 down. Winnipeg also lost ground, with good to choice veals mostly $10 to $11. There was little change elsewhere with top sales at Calgary $10.25, Edmonton $10, Prince Albert and Moose Jaw $9, Saskatoon $10 and Regina $10.50.

Little Change in Hog Market

There was very little change in hog prices. The basic grade at Toronto yards and plants ranged from $11.25 to $11.45, with most of the closing sales at $11.35, off trucks dressed. Montreal opened at $11.50 but eased to $11.35 by the finish. Winnipeg held unchanged at $10.10 to $10.45 but Alberta markets again took on added strength, Calgary paying $10 to $10.35 and Edmonton $10.15 to $10.25. Prince Albert sold grade B-1 hogs at $9.60 to $9.95, Moose Jaw $9.75 with a few sales at $9.85, Regina $9.75 to $9.90, Saskatoon $9.75 to $9.95 and Vancouver $10.75 to $11.20.

Lambs Gain at Toronto

Western lambs finished 25 cents higher at Toronto with sales at $11.25 and $11.10. A few ewes and wethers at Montreal made $10 and Winnipeg held firm under light receipts up to $10. The top paid at Calgary was $9.60, on a steady market, while Edmonton was unchanged up to $9.50. The high at Prince Albert was $8.50, Saskatoon $8.75, and Vancouver $10.50.

- CONSERVATION -

A WEEKLY COLUMN OF PRACTICAL OPINIONS OF THE VITAL ISSUES AFFECTING THE USES AND ABUSES OF NATURAL RESOURCES BY MR. LUDLOW JENKINS MARSHFIELD.

Can one ever forget the finding of his first woodcock's nest? Mine was in a patch of young second-growth of oaks and maples where the stone-studded ground gave chance for little undergrowth. The bird rose almost in my face, and revealed the four beautiful eggs at my feet. A few yards away she alighted, and nervously, and seemingly in pain, threaded her way among the rough frost-riven boulders, seeking to draw me from the spot. When next the place was visited I failed at first to flush her and thought that she was away from the nest, but finally detected her within a foot of my shoe. An attempt to stroke her back just failed she slipped away from under my hand. Almost daily I went there, hoping to see the newly hatched young, until one day only the discarded shells were found. Those particular young birds I was never able to find, but as the recurring spring sped by many mother birds that were guarding their buffy short-billed youngsters came under my observation, and many interesting habits were revealed.

The woodcock lays its eggs, almost always four in number, in a hollowed place in last year's blanket of leaves. Though they seem large for the size of the bird, they are so cunningly marked with buff and brown that the closest scrutiny often fails to reveal them on their leafy bed. In Louisiana and Flordia its southern limit, the bird may lay in January or even in December. Farther north the date is successively later, and in the northernmost haunts it may be late May ere the season is deemed suitable. For three weeks the patient mother guards them from cold and storm, and not infrequently is hurried by an early snow-rail. Undoubtedly the male bird assists he in the incubation, else the mother would have no chance to feed. When the eggs hatch she leads the tiny buff and black-spotted babies away almost at once, and the discarded shells may usually be found in the abandoned nest. If danger threatens she attempts, usually with success, to decoy the enemy from the spot, and often carries one or more of her defenceless babies out of the danger zone. This habit has been noted many times by reliable observers, both in the case of the old-world woodcock and our own species, and is accomplished in several ways. In the only instance personally observed the young apparently was held between the thighs of the mother, but others have seen the young grasped by the feet of the old one, and thus carried to safety.

I am not aware that the food of young woodcocks has ever been studied, but it is almost certainly the same as that of the adult. Earthworms constitute the principal item of the diet, though various insects found by the bird beneath the leaves are also eaten. Captive woodcocks have been known to devour twice their weight in earth-worms each day, and their demands for food usually lead to their liberation. On at least one occasion young birds raised in semi-captivity became so tame that they would fly up and alight on the shoulders of their owner.

This, then is one of the birds that some writers would have us believe carry no esthetic charm. This lovely creature, that sings to its mate from the air, that guards so closely its eggs that one may take it in hand, that carries its helpness young to safety when danger threatens, has no value, we are told, save that which may be measured by the joy attending its pursuit, and the succulence of its flesh, merely because it has been designated as a game bird. And for the present gratification of its pursuit, the gunners seem willing to destroy the bird forever. It is not enough that its nesting haunts are ravaged by fire, that storms of unusual severity take cruel toll of the fast-diminishing remnant, and that the telegraph wire have now been added to the list of it destroyers.

Close students of the woodcock warn us of its impending extinction unless the present rate of destruction be curbed, and there is a widespread demand from naturalists, seconded by many sportsmen, that more decided measures for its protection be adopted. Forbush, himself a sportsman a keen naturalist, who has studied the woodcock for many years, after recounting some of the dangers that attend the bird in its winter home, says: "But their greatest danger, the country over, lies in the multiplication of gunners. An expert shot with a good woodcock dog can kill most of the birds his dog puts up. In the upper Mississippi Valley the woodcock is now practically a thing of the past. Its greatest refuge and breeding-ground at present is the Atlantic coast territory, particularly New England and the southern part of the Maritime Provinces. If we do not adequately protect it here, its extirpation is only a question of time."

Legislation in favor of this splendid species has always lagged far behind the bird's real need. Three-quarters of a century ago Frank Forester, Lewis, and other thoughtful sportsmen began to urge its greater protection. These early efforts were directed mainly toward the abolition of summer and spring shooting, which caused the destruction of many young birds scarcely able to fly, or the parents of still helpless young. Gradually both summer and spring shooting were outlawed, in Rhode Island as early as 1846, and in Ohio 1878, declared a bag-limit of twenty-five birds a day and Illinois a close season of four years beginning in 1911. In 1901, A. K. Fisher naturalist and sportsman, published a powerful appeal for legislative and voluntary reduction shooting to save this "vanishing bird" from extinction. It is somewhat discouraging to note that at that time, more than half a century after the warning had been sounded, ten states gave absolutely no protection, and nine others still permitted summer shooting. No outstanding remedial measures, however, resulted from this appeal, though since that time bag limits have gradually been lowered, and in many cases seasons have been shortened. The Federal Migratory Bird Law, and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act have undoubtedly greatly helped by the bird, but these have not sufficed to offset the effects attendant on our increasing population, and its facilities and will for destruction. In even a brief statement of the legislation affecting the woodcock two factors that contributed to its former wholesale destruction should be mentioned. The demand for its flesh resulted in seventy-five cents each being a common price for the seven or eight-ounce birds. In the days of unrestricted market-hunting this naturally led to great slaughter when large flights were encountered. Judging by the scores admitted by prominent sportsmen of those days, that class was no less culpable. The comparatively early breeding, and the consequent maturity of the birds at a date when no other shooting was permissible, resulted in an open season beginning in summer, and this practice, as has been noted, was difficult to drive from the mind.

The hours of darkness are the woodcock's delight, and so well is he able to take care of himself then, that we have yet to find a record of the capture of the bird by any species of owl, though the smaller predatory mammals probably destroy some, and cats are known to kill many. In his daylight activities also, in a state of Nature, he appears to have been very self-reliant. He moves but seldom of his own accord, and is not easily flushed. Only one woodcock, taken by a marsh hawk, appears in the records of the stomach contents of nearly a thousand hawks, representing nine species, and including large numbers of those kinds known to subsist mainly on birds. As all these hawks represented localities and seasons when woodcock were presumably present, we may acquit the birds of prey of any complicity in lessening the ranks of this species. But the trained dog unerringly points out the woodcock's lurking place, the bird's tameness allows the hunter to place himself in the most advantageous position for a shot, and the proportion of birds killed is probably greater than in the case of any other game bird. Many hunters claim more than a fifty per cent kill of woodcock started; one killed thirty-eight out of forty-one flushed. Frequently woodcock will fly only a short distance, and often they will alight within sight. They have also a liking for a particular place and often can be found in the same thicket on successive days. Most of this destruction occurs during the southward flight, mainly at the time of the bright moon of October, when the birds congregate by day in favored haunts.

What may happen to a bird like the woodcock was well shown in mid-February, 1899, when a very severe snowstorm, followed by freezing weather, occured over most of the eastern seaboard. Great numbers of wintering and northward-migrating woodcock, then concentrated in the Carolinas and other southeastern states, were overwhelmed by deep snow and frozen feeding grounds, and perished in vast numbers from cold, starvation, and unrestricted shooting. A reliable and careful observer, A. T. Wayne, estimated that tens of thousands were killed by so-called sportsmen on this occasion. The name of the wretch who in a few hours shot two hundred pairs of these freezing, straving, emaciated birds is fortunately not recorded. The dearth of sympathetic observers in the affected area prevented any adequate estimate of the total damage, but it was tremendous. Barrow-loads of the slaughtered birds were offered for sale. The effect was apparent for many years, but beyond the recording of the phenomenon in a few journals the tragedy was treated merely as a passing incident, and no helpful legislation seems to have resulted.

Present day facilities for quick transportation have made possible the massing of gunners in places where undue numbers of woodcock congregate in migration, due to convergence of flight lines caused by peculiar coast trends. It is a sad commentary on our methods of game protection that such opportunities for destruction are almost never met by any effective restrictive measures.

For hundreds of years the woodcock of Europe has been much esteemed by sportsmen, and it was natural that the American bird should early claim the attention of hunters, especially after the improvement of firearms. Accounts of the abundance in early days read almost like fairy-tales, and recollections of our own boyhood experiences bring up memories of thronging autumn coverts and well-tenanted breeding places that we wish might be repeated. But the effects of continuous persecution are all too apparent. Thoughtful writers testify to the birds growing scarcity throughout its range. Occasionally a unusual combination of weather conditions may result in the appearance of large numbers in certain places, and create a false impression of abundance in the minds of the uninformed. But these aggregations almost always result in slaughter, and are really indicative of lessened numbers.

Aside from the Java woodcock and one or two insular forms of doubtful validity, only two species of true woodcocks are known. The Eurasian species, Scolopax rusticcla, ranges from western Europe eastward to Japan, and from the Himalayas northward into Siberia. The other is our own American bird, Philohela (or Rubicola) minor, which breeds from southern Canada south to Florida and Louisiana, and west to the Mississippi Valley and casually farther. Over at least the northern half of this range the bird must absent itself in winter. The extraordinary scientific interest attaching to a group so sparingly represented, and of relatively restricted distribution, and the charm of the bird to the Nature lover, would seem to more than offset and claim that the sportsman may have on the remnant now surviving, unless it be given a term of absolute protection. No one can deny that man is responsible for the present plight of the woodcock, since the destructive effect of its natural enemies is negligible. It it not reasonable therefore, to ask that the utmost safeguards be placed around this species, that a tragedy like that of the passenger pigeon may be averted?

TIMELY NOTES ON TOPICS CONNECTED WITH Silver Fox Farming

J. Walter Jones, M.A., M.L.A., Bunbury, whose activities embrace farming in all its branches, stock-raising—principally Holsteins — fox farming, some years ago added a few pairs of mink. Wednesday he was very gratified to receive in the mail an account sales from the Maritime Fur Pool Ltd., Moncton, N.B., for 36 mink pelts shipped through W. Chester S. McLure. These brought $468, or an average of $13.00 each. The litters totalled 56, but 20 of the best were selected for keeps or replacing adults pelted. Mr. Jones was a bit timid about mink breeding at first, sharing the view popularly held that because of the proximity of salt water, pelts would not be as well furred as in more inland provinces. However, he is pretty well over that idea now, and is of the opinion that mink farming offers a greater return on the investment than fox farming.

It is really rather peculiar that more people did not go in for mink farming in this province. It is not that we did not know about it, there were two or three mink farms here doing rather well fifteen or more years ago, yet somehow it did not appeal to the fox ranchers, perhaps because they were doing well enough with their own line. However, more wideawake people in other parts of Canada went ahead and some have made fortunes the past three or four years, while we fox farmers were in the doldrums. There are ranches in Ontario and Quebec, plenty of them, raising from three thousand to eight thousand mink annually and their profits are enormous. One thing mink farming did for us is that it took away considerable attention from fox farming, otherwise there would have been more people in our line of endeavor and the markets would have been even more glutted than they were.

The Canadian Fur Auction Sales Company, Limited, will hold their next auction of silver foxes Thursday, February 20, when the first section consisting of 7,400 pelts will be offered. On the following day 7,000 pelts of the second section will be auctioned. We understand that the collection is practically all fresh pelts, with a large number of selects and a small number of inferiors. This sale promises to be one of the most important of the entire season.

Fromm Bros.' sale of Federal silver fox pelts (consigned by other breeders to them) had an auspicious opening in New York last Monday when 97 per cent. of that day's offerings were sold at an advance of from 7½ to 10 per cent. (quality for quality considered) over the previous December sale. The top price was $115 for a very beautiful full silver. Goods in the $50 to $60 class were in particularly strong demand, the price rise at these levels averaging 10 per cent. in contrast to a 7½ per cent. average increase in the sales below $50. The total number of skins to be offered was 25,000, of which only a part were disposed of on Monday. It would probably be last Thursday before the entire offering was auctioned. The average price realized for Monday's pelts was $36.69.

C. J. James, who has made a success of breeding fisher, writes a very interesting article in the form of a questionnaire appearing in the American Fur Breeder for February.

Q. Are fisher anything like mink?

A. Yes. They have much the same short legs and fairly long body, but of course, are much larger.

Q. Do you feed anything like mink?

A. Yes, the same food. Any satisfactory mink ration would probably suit them. They require about twice the quantity or a little more on the average.

Q. Are fisher polygamous?

A. Yes, young fisher can be run together in groups of one male to several females at mating season.

Q. When is the mating season?

A. April. Fisher mate when a year old.

Q. What is the period of gestation?

A. Approximately 51 weeks. Females mate again a week after whelping.

Q. How many kits per litter?

A. From 1 to 5, average 3 or better.

Q. Why raise fisher?

A. Because it is beautiful fur of fine dark color with some contrasting gray brown on head and shoulders. It is comparatively rare so it is still an exclusive fur. For these reasons it is always in demand. There is a future to fisher farming.

Dr. Agnes Fay Morgan, University of California nutrition expert, has recently reported in the Journal of Nutrition that she has been able to produce patinum foxes by controlling a certain vitamin in the animal's diet. the platinum effect was obtained by depriving the foxes temporarily of the vitamin B. "filtrable factor," a substance which resists graying in some animals. Dr. Morgan ventures an opinion that there is a possibility that fur breeders could produce a platinum effect with ordinary silver foxes by carefully controlling the anti-gray factor in their feed. She did say that the foxes on the deficient diet are likely to be of poorer quality than the normal silver fox.

Considerable attention has been focused on mink farming, principally because it has been very remunerative to breeders the past few years. The latest information we can get on the subject is that the total production of ranch and wild mink in the United States and Canada for the season of 1940 is around 900,000 to 1,000,000 skins. Of these, it is estimated that about 700,000 will be ranch mink and between 200,000 and 300,000 will be wild mink. Most of the Canadian mink will be consumed in the United States as well as all or practically all of the American mink. Of the production of ranch mink about 200,000 will be fine skins, about 350,000 medium and lower grade and the balance consisting of about 150,000, suitable for trimmings and accessories. It is estimated that the finer grades would produce about 10,000 garments and about 1,000 of these—the best — would retail for $3,000 or more. Another thousand would be priced at $2,500, about 1,200 in the $2,000 class and the balance would sell anywhere between $550 and $1,500.

We note by the American Fur Breeder that Roland Tuplin, of Michigan, breeder of champion foxes and son of Frank Tuplin, one of the pioneer ranchers of this province, has sold his fox farm due to illness, and is now taking treatment in the western part of the United States.

One of the most successful platinum ranches in the United States is known as the Buffalo Bill Fox Farm at Cody, Wyoming. Foxes from this ranch won the principal prizes at the Michigan-Ohio Fox Show, 1940. Many of our readers will remember the exploits of William Cody, better known as Buffalo Bill. He was a magnificent figure of a man and came into fame first as a rider on the Pony Express, carrying the mails for the Wells Fargo Express, and as a scout for the United States troops in their wars with the Indians. When the Union Pacific was being built he undertook to supply gangs of workmen with Buffalo meat and he was such a successful buffalo hunter that he was given the soubriquet Buffalo Bill. Years after he formed a wild west circus and toured the United States, Canada, and the principal capitals of Europe. He made a great hit with King Edward VII., who was a frequent visitor to his show in London, and Cody was invited to dine at Buckingham Palace. He was a deadly shot with a rifle and revolver. It is probable that the proprietor of the Buffalo Fox Farm at Cody is a descendant of the one and only Buffalo Bill.

The Illinois Fox and Fur Breeders' Association held their annual pelt show at the Faust Hotel, Rockford, January 11. There was a splendid line of pelts shown and the Judge had his hands full picking out the prize winners. One of the principal winners was Ray Callaghan, of Geneva, president of the Association, whose entries in the sweepstakes medium silver class took first, second and third place awards. His pelts also won first and second place in the three-quarter silver class. Most unique of the awards was the Purina trophy, known as the Dalton Gavel, and made of wood from the fox pens of Sir Charles Dalton's original silver fox ranch located on Cherry Island off the coast of Prince Edward Island, where silver foxes were first raised successfully in captivity. At the business session which followed the show, Ray Callaghan of Geneva, was re-elected president, Mrs. E. M. Nicholls of Princeton, secretary. E. M. Nicholls, treasurer.

Ray Callaghan referred to above is a son of our esteemed silver fox rancher, W. P. Callaghan, formerly of St. Louis, but now residing in Summerside. Mr. Callaghan was a great friend of Sir Charles Dalton, and in his day bred some of the finest foxes ever produced in this country, foxes which were the progenitors of many of the prize winners and best breeding stock in western Canada ranches, notably the MacDonald ranch of Saskatoon.

(Continuedon page 13, Col 8)

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NEWSY NATURE NOTES

By Stuart L. Thompson

THE ROBBER BARON OF THE SNOW CASTLE

One winter day while crossing a snowy field I came upon the marks of tiny footprints in pairs, left by a little animal as it had bounded over the snow. I knew it at once to be the trail of a weasel, for it was much too large and extended for that of a mouse; and far too small to be left by a skunk or cat. What puzzled me was that a weasel should be away out here on an open field, so far from shelter of any kind. He generally seeks rougher spots for his hunting. Curiousity led me to follow the little tracks, for many interesting facts come to light as one unravels a trail.

Clearly my weasel had been out hunting, probably during the previous night. The trail led here and there almost never in a straight line, showing clearly on the smooth surface of the softer snow, but lost to view where the frozen crust had held the little animal more fircely. A patch of long dead grass always lured him aside. Sometimes I found that he had actually disappeared into its depts, reappearing upon the snow farther on. Thus I knew him to be in search of mice. Occasionally he halted as though he were looking about, or perhaps sniffing the wind for scent of prey, then, on he went to the next patch. As I followed the trail for hundreds of yeards, I found his actions had been so vividly recorded during this meandering hunt that I could almost see the lithe little animal skipping nimbly along in graceful bounds, his tiny feet leaving the dainty footprints I had come upon.

But all trails must end, I traced his to the farthest corner of the field. Here the crooked rail-fence and weeds had stayed the force of the wind resulting in a smooth clean snow-drift. Weasel tracks criss-crossed the snow in all directions, leading to and from a number of small round holes, showing clearly in several places in the snow. I had tracked the little villian to his den — the robber baron to his castle.

So far the picture had been one of still life. From far out on the wide field to the snow-drift, the story had been as though written in cold still footprints on a snowy page, and thus it would have remained, but for the little author himself. It was he who added the living touch so lifeless a record needed. As I was cautiously examining these various entrances in the snow drift, there suddenly appeared the head and shoulders of the weasel. He was but a yard away from me as I bent over a hole. There he stood for several moments, looking exactly like a diminutive polar bear in his white fur and black nose and eyes, surrounded by Arctic scenery. Though in the full glare of the mid-day sun, he did not appear to see me. He turned his head this way and that as though to say, "Dear me, that's strange, I thought I heard someone out here, yet no one is in sight." Perhaps he was dazzled by the strong daylight; or maybe weasels are accustomed to hunt by sense of mell and do not see very well. However that may be he looked hard for me, while I gazed at him motionless, lest I break the spell. Then quietly he drew himself back in out of sight and was gone.

No doubt each night he sallies forth from the snowy fastness of his castle and wanders far wide over his domain to murder and to ravage. But though he may escape the clutches of his enemy, the great horned owl, he cannot help leaving behind where ever he goes, the telltale trail that led me to his lair.

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