

A crew of tree men

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“Living Lore in N.E.” Series

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A crew of tree men of state or federal forestry service have been lopping limbs off one of the stately old elms near Mr. Botsford's home and while he does not question the necessity of the act, he is grieved at the loss of the tree.

“I s'pose they'll end by choppin' it down,” he says. “That's the one was hit by the hurricane. Another one down the street further has been condemned, I understand. Got some disease or other.

“When we first moved up on this street, back in seventy, there wasn't but two trees on the whole street. My father and Hen Smith, and Jim Gilbert and Catlin, they went way down along the banks of the Naugatuck and got some young elms. Wasn't no bigger around than your arm. Them are the trees you see out along here today, and that one they're workin' on is one of them.

“Just think how many years it took for them trees to grow to as big as they are today. Don't it seem like a damn shame when one of them is cut down?”

“I wouldn't let nobody touch the one in front of my house. Some years ago the telephone people wanted to out through it. I says No, sir, nothin' doin'. They can't do it without they

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get your permission, you know. I own out as far as the middle of the road. If they was to abandon that road --the state or the town, I mean--I could fence it off right up to the middle. And if they dig a hole for a telephone pole right in front of my property and I go out and jump in that hole --can't nobody make me get out of there.

"I wouldn't let 'em cut through that tree. You know they don't care how they do it, they'd spoil the tree. I wanted the shade, anyway.

"There was a great big pine once, down in front of Atwood's--it blew down during a summer storm. Biggest pine tree I ever see. Must have been two-three hundred years old."

Mr. Botsford breaks off, holds up an admonitory finger to maintain silence. "Thought so," he says. "Cat wants to come in." He arises nimbly from his Morris chair by the kitchen stove to open the door for his jet black, lustrous pet, Nigger, by name, of whom he is inordinately fond. Nigger, though he is of a breed notoriously selfish, cold and reserved, returns his master's affection to a remarkable degree.

"Yes," says Mr. Botsford, in answer to a remark of mine, "I like cats. I listen to a program on the radio regular for people that like 'em. Tell you somethin' funny.

"I was up town not long ago, parked near Anderson's, and I come to put some bundles in the car, and there was a feller parked right near me so's I couldn't get out. He asked me was I goin' out and I said no. I looked in his car and he had a big gray Persian in the front seat. On the back seat there was a little fox terrier. His wife come out and got in the car and she called the cat, and darned if it didn't jump in the back right along side the dog. They as pals, the feller said.

"Well, we got talkin' about eats, and I told him a story I heard on the air. Seems they was a big old tom cat--reglar alley cat, up around Boston somewheres, was the boss of his neighborhood. 3 a reg'lar tough old alley cat, known all over for a fighter. Lady come along

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one time and she see this cat layin' in the gutter, Some car had hit it. She was a lover of cats and she picked it up and took it home. And it got well.

“She had a couple of Persians, and she entered ‘em in a cat show. They raised holy hell, wouldn't be quiet and caused quite a rumpus and finally the feller in charge called her up and told her about it. She said she didn't know what the matter was. Well, he asked her if she had another cat to home, and she said yes, but it was just an old alley cat. So he says never mind, bring it down anyway. And she did. And the other two cats quieted down right away. They'd missed him, you see. When they come to award the prizes, who do you think got first? The old alley cat!

“Well, I told the story to that feller, and he laughed and said: ‘Mister you aren't tellin' me anything. I was there, I was at that show.’ What do you think of that?”

I ask Mr. Botsford if he thinks it possible to make distinctions between cats in the same manner in which dog fanciers determine the qualities of various breeds.

“Yessir,” he declares. “There's as much difference between cats of different kinds as there is between a Swede and an Eytalian. P.T. Barnum --he was no fool, mind you --he offered \$5,000 to anyone'd bring him a female* tortoise shell. Nobody ever got that money. They're a freak.

“You'll hear stories about crosses between a cat and a ‘coon.

* Note: Should be Male. Tri-colored, or “tortoise shell” cats are always females. - (W.H.G.)

4

Can't be done. Ain't possible. Nature makes it possible up to a certain point. Like crossin' a horse and a donkey to get a mule, But there it stops. They can't get beyond a mule.

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“They should have done somethin' like that with the colored race. A breedin' experiment. They might have bred out all the black ones, and got 'em lighter and lighter in color until they was all white. They they wouldn't have the big problem they got on their hands now.

Mr. Botsford takes time out to replenish and light his pipe from a large tobacco tin near the radio. The he is off on a new track.

“If you was to set out for a trip to the west, how would you go about it?” The question is purely rhetorical. Mr. Botsford explains in detail the procedure to be followed.

“They say railroad travel is comin' back,” he says. “They've done everything they could to make it more attractive--streamline trains and the like o' that. Now what they've got to do next is cut down fares. I'll predict that some day, they're goin' to scale their fares by zones, same's parcel post. You go anywhere in the same zone for the same fare. (I hesitate to accuse Mr. Botsford of piracy or plagiarism or whatever the term may be in this instance, for I have a vast respect for the old gentleman, but I believe I have seen his “prediction” in print somewhere in the form of a concrete suggestion for betterment of the railroads. It may be simply another indication of that mighty unseen channel, in which, so the saying goes, “great minds run.”) 1

“There's a lot of fellers in town beginnin' to use the railroads 5 again for trips to New York. Used to be up to just lately, they'd drive their cars down to Stamford or somewheres and grab the train from there. But two-three of them I know have gone on the train here lately. I used to go a lot myself, years 'n years ago. Been down once on the streamliner, here a few years ago. I had a ride on that old Sixth Avenue L they're tearin' down too.

“First place the country folks used to head for years ago was the Eden Musee. That was quite a place. Fifty cents, I think it was, to get in. The dummies was so lifelike they used to fool everyone. Note [?]”

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“I went in there, and I says, By God they ain't goin' to fool me. Mose Ariel was with me. There was a cop standin' near the door, a big strappin feller, and a young lad pickin' his pocket. Of course that wouldn't fool nobody. Then there was an old feller hunched up on a bench, readin' a paper. We see two lads speak to him, ask him some question. It was a dummy. We had some laugh! Then Mose got fooled. There was a little kid standin' there with some papers and he went up to buy one. That was a dummy too.

“But I was havin' pretty good luck. I got by them all, and we was on our way out, and we see two fellers settin' on a bench, very quiet. I says, ‘Them dummies look more real than any we seen yet.’ The fellers commenced to laugh to beat the band. They got me at last, you see. They had me fooled.

“The Chamber of Horrors was a big attraction in the Eden Musee. They had executions, and famous murders, and one of the big exhibits was that English feller that went down to South Africa and got caught in the cane brakes and killed by a lot of savages.

6

“It was quite a thing, quite a thing.” Mr. Botsford gets up to look at his fire, which is apparently getting low. “Looks like I'll have to get some coal,” says he; “you goin', are you? Well, come up again, come up again. And hand me that paper, will you, on the front porch.”
